WINGS AND HACKLE.

FLY FISHING

FOR

TROUT & GRAYLING

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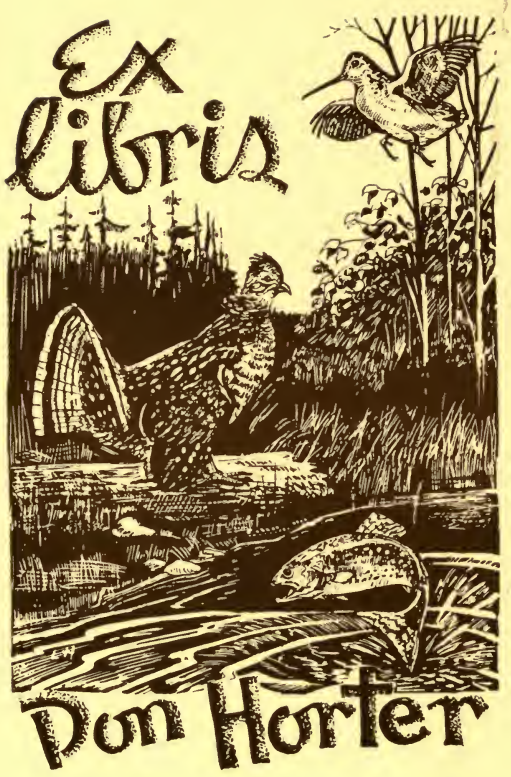

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WINGS AND HACKLE.

To

J. E. Smart

My Ceylon Friend

and

Angling Tutor,

and to

My Fellow Members

of

The Stock Exchange.

These are the days that must happen to you,
You shall not heap up what is call'd riches.

Walt Whitman

WINGS and HACKLE.

A POT-POURRI

OF

FLY FISHING

FOR

TROUT & GRAYLING

AND OF

NOTES ON BIRD LIFE,

CHIEFLY IN

HAMPSHIRE, DEVON AND DERBYSHIRE.

BY

RAYMOND HILL.

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PREFACE.

Sed nunc dilatis averte negotia curis
Et gratam requiem dona tibi quando licebit
Per totam cessare diem. Non teneris ulla
Mentio.

JUVENAL.

Put off all cares, lay business aside, and allow yourself pleasing respite since you may be idle all day long. Let there be no talk of money out at interest.

PROBABLY the last touches given to the average book are the few pages which form the introduction. This is so in the present instance. And an additional fact may be added: that no 'circle of friends' have 'urged me to publish' these scattered reminiscences of out-door scenes. Indeed my few friends—whom I have not consulted at all—would certainly have urged me in an opposite direction. Perhaps this is the only originality connected with the publication.

So far as I have seen, the man born and brought up in the country in England is not the one whose love of outdoor life and of nature in her more natural state becomes the chiefest pleasure of his middle age existence. Too many country born men thirst for the waters of Babylon in lieu of those of Derbyshire or Dartmoor and occasionally become so deeply baptised in the business cares or joys of Walbrook or Conduit Street that they quite forget their old home and its humble and

innocent pleasures. It is often to the wearied City man that the river calls most audibly. If once the spirit of the stream can gain his ear for a quiet hour in Spring or early Summer she will whisper a tale of future delights which can soothe the troubles of a twelvemonth. She can tell him more of ease and contentment in a few flashing moments as he lays his head back among the young bracken and closes his eyes than the wealth of the Stock Exchange can ever promise or perform in a life time. The tinkling of even the tiniest stream strikes a responsive chord the harmony of which sets a thousand pleasant memories vibrating, which displace for the time being all harassing thoughts and worrying topics. To the barrister talking in carbonised courts, to the stock dealer yelling in the heated House or to the ordinary business clerk jaded by eleven months of long hours, long wrangles with his fellows or still longer wrestling with recalcitrant columns of figures, a holiday spent in fishing comes as a holy pleasure. If he does not feel this then he has not been worked to within a dangerous limit of breaking point.

That awful law in London which makes life so galling is absent from angling. Thank heaven, on the river bank Competition is unknown. One has heard of a 'fishing competition' but like a nightmare it need not be referred to. The real charm, the real rest cure of fishing lies in its comparative solitariness. To be able to say I have not talked for six

hours, nor fingered money, nor caught trains, nor bored any of my fellows, nor lied, nor sinned, nor betted, nor breathed used up air, forms at least a comfortable confession, which, when repeated day after day for some weeks cannot but restore health and nerves to a normal condition.

Then as to age. 'Staleness' in fishing—as understood by a boxer—is so slow a process that the angler hardly feels it. I met a man at the "Isaac Walton" who was spinning a minnow at the age of 86 and who told me he had fished the Dove for seventy years. A young and active man can make fly fishing quite a strenuous sport, walk eight miles in heavyish kit, crouch, stoop and crawl until he tires himself out completely even before he faces the long tramp home. A middle-aged man can laze and smoke half the day and yet do well in the basket filling line. Or an old man can take the air by the river-side and still enjoy himself with very little exertion. To leave a stool or an easy chair in an office after a year's sedentary work and then rush off to Switzerland and tramp for ten hours a day during a three weeks holiday is a poor way—physically, of restoring tone, and in a man past forty it probably does his heart no good, although it will harden his calves.

Like many other City men I have had to take my chance on open or club water. No solitudes of Ducal stream stocked with unpricked three pounders have ever floated a fly of mine,

so that anything in the form of a red letter day here recorded can be easily rivalled by others after a few years' practice and experience who are similarly reduced to fish in stretches of Hotel or other so called Preserved rivers where the fool at one end of the line is certainly pitting himself against a sharp eye and a slippery skin at the other. And finally if I can interest any reader in just that outside fringe of natural history with which I am acquainted, and induce him to derive pleasure from the same source, and regard with indulgence all references to trivial experiences with birds and flies—with wings and hackle—I shall be glad to have recorded them.

HINTS FOR BEGINNERS.

THE ROD—THE LINE—THE CAST—THE FLY—THE HOOK—THE BARB.

THE legal day on which Trout Fishing begins in South Devon is 2nd February, and it therefore need hardly be said that, given suitable weather, this is the easiest as well as the earliest time a beginner can choose to make his first acquaintance with the fish which is perhaps destined to add a charm to his life for another forty or fifty years. Often and often after a mild winter trout are in actually better condition in an open and sunny week of February than they are in the harsh and windy weather of a month later.

Before attempting to describe trout fishing from the opening of the season let me try and briefly give the process in the simplest language from the beginner's standpoint. Every angler can skip the following pages, leaving them to the man who frankly owns he does not know a trout when he sees one and who has never affixed a reel to a rod nor tied a knot in anything but a shoelace or a necktie.

For initial outfit regard forty or fifty shillings as necessary, sixteen of which can be expended upon a neat greenheart rod of 9 feet 6 inches or ten feet—avoid anything an inch longer—of three joints with a spare top the pair of which fit into a hollow bamboo case. This latter is fitted at the lower end to receive the screw of a collapsible landing net which can be adjusted on trial at the time of purchase. Let the rod err on the side of lightness and stiffness and so save an aching wrist and a wobbly unmanageable motion. It should have fixed upright rings through which a line runs easily and without kinking. See that the butt of the rod contains a threaded hole for receiving the screw of a spike and that this spike is contained in the jean case—in fact see that it fits. To use a rod without being able to spike it into the grass usually means that you or a friendly companion or cow will tread upon the middle joint as it lies in the meadow while you are looking for a fly or the pair of scissors you have dropped.

A reel will cost seven to ten shillings; and the centre of it instead of consisting of a single bar of a quarter-inch diameter (off which a line will never run smoothly or easily) should be flanged by five or six bars forming a drum with a diameter of 1½ to 2 inches. This advantage is apparent both for ready winding and for keeping the line well aired. Reels of the plain centre bar variety are usually 'advised' to beginners by shopmen who find

that every angler rejects them even at their reduced sale price.

For the line pay another nine shillings, thirty yards, tapered at each end so as to admit of its reversal upon the reel at the end of the season, or before that in the event of a serious break. For wet fly fishing a level line is good enough but as with care the life of a good line is five seasons whereas the rod may be supplanted after two by an expensive split cane, it is just as well to get the tapered line at once, although the charm is chiefly appreciable in dry fly fishing. By getting an Olinea line something as near to present day perfection can be obtained provided it is aired round a chair back after a day's use and rubbed with vaseliny fingers the next morning while rewinding it on to the reel.

Before speaking of the 'cast' as the action of throwing the fly, let us consider it as that six or nine foot length of gut which is attached to the line. Some anglers make their own casts: that is they buy hanks of gut of different thicknesses and knot them together. It is probable that at first the most convenient plan is to buy the casts ready made. Later on in one's angling career the making up of casts becomes a leisurely and pleasant mid-day occupation when one is nursing oneself for a strenuous evening's fishing. How well I can recall the very primitive inn where I first enjoyed a day's gut soaking and cast making.

For whatever style of fishing is adopted a tapered cast from stout to fine gut is decidedly

the most handy and workable. It may safely be said that little is lost by having the upper strands of gut fairly thick. It assists accurate throwing and minimises tangling. It lasts double as long; and moreover should a break occur this usually means only the two finer strands leaving six feet of the original to carry on with. For upstream fishing with a wet fly it is as well to affix a 'dropper' which is put on some two or three feet from the end of the cast. An ordinary gut-tied fly can be used for this purpose and looped on just above a knot so as to stand out some three inches at right angles to the cast. For tail fly eyed hooks should be used as they alone will stand the constant flicking to which they are subjected.

Without using clear illustrations and far clearer language than I am master of it is well nigh useless to touch upon the matter of knots. A visit to an angling friend will effect more than any explanation can do, and if the various knots are first tied in stout string through a loop made out of a hairpin their power of resistance and their general efficiency are far more easily seen and understood than if tied in fine gut through the tiny eye of a hook. Some men are born with a natural aptitude for knots. Besides being able to tie them by feel—and consequently in the dusk—they are able to invent knots of their own. Others are either clumsy or resent the trouble involved and will even have entire casts made up by tackle makers before starting off on an angling

holiday. All I can say is that if any man loses as many fish as I have through hasty or bad principled knots he has my sympathy. To tie neat knots with the ends closely snipped off so that the whole cast runs through the palm of the hand without catching in each bit of rough skin constitutes a charm which always stands one in good stead. Even with fish rising around one and with only half-an-hour between you and the last light it is seldom wise to hurry in the making of any knot.

Flies are not easy to thread in the dusk and consequently it is as well to have fully half-a-dozen ready done and kept for emergencies either in a damp box or far better in the damped underflap of a Burberry hat. In case of necessity for replacing a lost or unsuccessful fly it is easy enough to tie an ordinary double water knot in the dark. And I would like just here to refer to that very common accident of finding the barb of the hook gone—an accident probably caused by the fly touching or catching in a grass stalk while extended over the meadow behind one. For a long time I supposed it invariably broke off in a river stake or in the jaw of a lost fish, but now am convinced to the contrary and believe that twice out of three times the barb has gone a cast or two before the one which succeeded in rising and hooking—for one struggling moment—that fish which you are sure during the lonely walk home was by far the heaviest you touched all day. So important is this barb business that a small

magnifying glass should be carried and the hook examined through it, when a touch with a fine file can often be given with advantage. Whenever a fish is lost and the fly comes back apparently free the thought of 'barb gone' should recur, even with grayling whose mouths far more often give way to the hook than the barb does to them.

Just as spare flies tied on to gut should be carried already damped, so in summertime should an entire spare cast be made ready with a single fly—probably a sedge—attached to it and be coiled either round one's hat (in wet weather) or kept in an envelope between damp blotting paper. Then if a hopeless break occurs after sundown it proves a godsend to the distracted fisherman and relieves him of that arm-straining action of holding up a cast to the sky and making entanglement worse entangled. He can cut the whole cast adrift and put on the new one within a few minutes. This spare cast need not be more than seven feet and should be devoid of any 'dropper' for the obvious reason that in the dusk when throwing for rises the tail fly is all one wants to watch, while if a good fish takes it and careers as near to bushes and weeds as he can there is no dropper to assist him in hitching up. After a few seasons' experience it will be found that the loss of an entire cast is a rare occurrence. You may use one through a Mayfly week without losing anything beyond the point or last strand of fine gut. Sometimes however in windy weather

accidents are inevitable, the whole cast is wafted right across a blackberry bush and the line itself has to be cut at the risk too of falling into the river.

Casts if made up oneself from lengths of plain white gut should of course be stained. Inky-blue for chalk streams or perhaps green when weeds are prevalent; while strong tea affords an excellent protective colouring for gravelly bottoms. Judsons' dyes are harmless enough. Even green baize soaked in a teacup will be found useful if nothing else is available.

CASTING—AS A BEGINNER.

Troubles of a Dry Fly Cast—The Perversity of Trout—Two Evenings' Experience.

THE actual muscular or mechanical action of casting a line with a fly attached admits of no explanation by mere words. As Mr. Herbert Spencer occupied several pages before acquiring the polysyllabic satisfaction of his definition of 'Life,' humbler individuals prone to the use of a single word when a cast goes wrong, may be forgiven if they avoid defining the process. It can only be acquired by practice and vastly improved by watching a good man at work while really fishing. To practice with a line upon a lawn is of course a good plan at first, keeping the elbow fairly close to one's side and using the forearm and wrist until by the knack of a slight but almost imperceptible jerk and pause the line flies forward and backward in the air without falling down at one's feet or becoming entangled with the top joint.

By the river's bank it all becomes more difficult and there is no denying that the per-

petual hitching up in grass, branches, or brambles forms a somewhat wearying drudgery which every beginner has to go through and finally conquer. How well we all know that distracting moment when, after getting out the exact length of line required to reach the rising fish, the fly is caught by the neck of a malignant buttercup far back in the meadow behind, or perhaps worse, by a small bramble which is absolutely hanging over the fish. How often in such positions have we crept back and carefully decapitated with scissors every flower or leaf which seemed likely to prove an obstacle, or crawled forward *ventre a terre* and chin in nettles with creel and landing net swinging round under our knees, to free the fly from its place over a trout's nose. Talk of an angler's patience, why the exasperation of such moments is without equal. If a cow treads on your top joint you have something to address your remarks to and you can blame your own carelessness for leaving your rod on the grass. Or if a bat takes your best fly at a time when you can scarcely see to thread on another. But the puff of wind which springs up actually after your correct cast is made and wafts your fly into the aforesaid bramble does not stop to listen. It has moved upstream with the fish and leaves you with your perspiration and expletives.

But what is the bright side of the picture and how well is the game worth the candle if the whole scheme works successfully and the fly

is taken? How disguise is then thrown to the winds as with line running off the reel one is free at length to stand up and play the man instead of the snake, as well as—perhaps—play the fish right into the landing net?

One of the most effective casts to use, especially for a trout rising under one's own bank, is where the rod is held almost parallel to the water and the fly is thrown as it were slightly upward instead of downward and is consequently able to pitch so softly that the odds are much in favour of its being mistaken for a real insect. In water but little fished—I have had no experience—a trout even if he pays no attention to the fly may at any rate not be seriously alarmed, and he may possibly be tempted with another pattern; but very different is his behaviour on club or open waters. Far too often the very sight of an artificial fly makes him shun all further thought of dessert. He slips away and sulks in a secluded drawing room half a fathom down among the weeds. In such a case it becomes obvious folly to continue casting at the spot. Nothing but a long rest is likely to cure him. Note the spot for another hour—or another day—and move along.

On certain warm evenings trout appear to be possessed of almost unnatural cunning, rendering it doubtful whether it is any use continuing to cast for them. I would like to describe two evenings spent by a large but still weir pool on the 29th and 30th of June.

The river was low and practically no water ran over the fir trunks which, laid side by side, formed the slope over which the river when full rushed with plenty of red or white foam. The pool itself was just about forty yards square so that every bit of it could be reached from one side or the other. Under the escarpment of fir poles the quiet bottle-green water was perhaps five or six feet deep shelving gradually away to a shallowing and shingly beach. As this beach was due west of the weir, anyone fishing in the evening enjoyed or rather endured the disadvantage of having the setting sun or its warm afterglow behind him, and I could not but remember how seldom any good fish were taken by anglers in that position. The day had been one of cloudless sunshine, a faint southerly wind and the air full of insect life.

After waiting until eight o'clock to see the arrival of the inevitable angler at this enviable period of the day and finding to my immense relief that he had been attracted elsewhere, I determined to risk a slippery fall and to get on to the sloping weir itself, take position on the slimy larch trunks, and await the evening rise. With no one watching it was not difficult and I managed to find an insecure seat-hold behind a clump of dock leaves and jetsam in which a dipper's brood had been hatched. Seated there with a background of the sloping weir and dark trees I could reach fully half, and that the deeper half, of the pool into which

little runnels of gurgling water found their way under the fir logs. Choosing a hackled blue upright the shape, size, and side-bend of which satisfied in every way I watched the water intently.

At about 8.15 the rise began, one—two—three fish, nice quiet pooly rises which promised all things. Selecting a fish which had three times taken down something from the same square inch of water I made a cast and never did a fly pitch more softly in the intended spot. It was untouched and it floated slowly down over the place where fish number two had just risen. This process was repeated quietly, and all the time both these and a full dozen of other fish were rising in the same determined manner, yet not one of them would even see the blue upright. I changed the fly to winged olive, smaller pattern, and again made some thirty casts. I changed again: without avail. The last train went by in the distance (8.45) and still not a touch. Then without rhyme or reason I was taken; a severe prick, tug—and gone. After that the rise continued for another twenty minutes and yet not a touch. I tell you it was maddening. No jumping out of water or bulging but a steady suck down each moment by good fish who seemed to have lost their heads with gnawing hunger. It was like being the victim of a nightmare.

Soon after nine the fish rose less; but still they continued at intervals—real lumpers for that water—literally asking to be hooked—and

yet not a touch of any fly I offered them! With back half paralysed by casting in this uncomfortable position and with grasp well nigh gone, I staggered up, got back to the bank and again tried in the growing darkness to secure one—only one to take home. But no, not even a sedge or a governor would they look at, so with angry heart, empty creel and damp *séant* I tramped the three weary miles home never to fish again.

* * * * *

Well, as we know, time heals all that, and the next day at teatime I was at the village inn half-a-mile from the aforesaid weir pool, putting together the maligned rod and the execrated line and affixing thereto the same accursed blue upright which had done such execution in distracting trout the evening before. Tea, Devonshire cream and a new mixture of tobacco had somehow combined to make the sight of the river palatable, and laughing at my feat of the previous evening I was even able to bear the sight of the green water viewed from the bridge parapet upon which on such a night as this promised to be, had the vicar of that old-world parish laid out exactly a year before glistening in the early June moonlight four trout each one over the full pound caught—with two others of smaller size—while sauntering hatless up the meadow below the weir, clad in dinner suit and evening shoes. His plan was to throw a dry fly left-handed over a low fringe of nasty bushes which nearly

every other angler passed by with a reminiscence of flies and entire casts caught up on horrible spiky branches overhanging the deeper water.

I stayed by the bridge for a long time thinking of the fish that had been lost under the red roots of those bushes, waiting both for the sun to set behind the high ground to the westward, and also to see if the last train brought any other angler. A friend came who had formed one in a small fisherman's knot at the Club that morning when I had described my catalogue of failure to which they listened with unappreciated attention. He was going a mile up the water, not even passing the weir pool, so that he would not interfere with me or my plans. At a little before 8 I decided after much vacillation to again climb on to the weir and this time to try the still stretch above it. There is always something very comfortable in finding oneself able to work from a lower level than the water and before long a promising fish rose close under the red cliff.

Owing to trailing ivy and upstanding foxgloves leaving as little space as they could through which to make a cast, it became a matter of creaking and crawling on a slimy edge board to get into a possible position, but the end rewarded the means for he took the blue upright without demur, behaved most sportingly, and was eventually netted after a final splash on the surface—a three-quarter pounder. Apparently this disturbed all others,

for not another rise took place even under the overhanging bushes where the natives of the deep pool might know themselves to be safe from feathered steel. So much so that I began to look below me at the weir pool which was so alive with rings the previous evening. There the fish began just as they had before, two especially rising in the same positions.

Slipping down to my old place it took but little time to make a cast for the first and as though by magic this was taken at once by something heavy. He hooked himself almost as he plunged down and kindly made away to the shallow water instead of collecting his thoughts and running under the fir poles with the line or the cast round an occasional rusty nail. Backwards and forwards he went boring down to the bottom, feeling on the long line as though he must be a two pound peal. After exhausting himself nobly among the stones he came lamblike to the net and proved my best of the month (1 lb. 3 oz.) This was evidently my No. 1 of the yestereve. Before completing his laying out in a wrapping of dockleaf, No. 2 was more than ready, swallowed the same fly as though it were a jujube—far down its gullet as it proved—and after a vicious kicking on the top of the water where it was held hard joined its companion in the creel.

During the ensuing half-hour nine or ten trout took that fly, mostly between 8 and 14 ounces, and of these all but two were landed,

one escaping after a quivering jump and the other breaking me, fortunately only the gut point, under the fir logs. After that I tied on the first fly that came to hand and it received due attention. Whether, mistaking my sex, *Notumque furens quid femina possit,* they feared she would come the next day and dynamite the pool, as Cingalese blasters do in Ceylon, can never be known, but anyhow they made ravenous amends. When reaching home I had nine fish the best seven of which weighed 5 lbs. 9 oz., by far my best basket for the season on that river. Latitude, longitude, temperature, season, time, wind, cast, fly, identity and position of angler, state of water in colour and volume, all were precisely similar on these two evenings, yet the results were accurately as described.

DOWN STREAM—UP STREAM—DRY FLY.

LET us suppose the time is Easter, which embraces the entire month of April. It is not too late for downstream fishing, and should you not as yet have learnt to throw a fly upstream well, it may be your only alternative, particularly if the water be rather full and coloured. Even for downstream fishing it is best to use a tapered cast as far less likely to tangle, while the old-fashioned flies tied on gut will save you trouble and perhaps be more effective. To give yourself every encouragement fish as far as you can with the wind behind you, so that the least effort is necessary for switching the flies on to the water. You have put on say a red-upright tail fly and an iron-blue as a dropper, both plain hackle. Cast them well out at right angles to the bank or slightly down stream and allow the current to carry them round in a semi-circle until they come almost to rest under your own bank. If the stream is fairly fast and you feel a tug hold the rod steady, and nine times out of ten the fish will hook himself. Some anglers say

strike, so if you like adopt both plans alternately and judge for yourself.

Probably like most people who take up fly fishing and who are keen to become more or less proficient at it, you will soon discard this method altogether, excepting when season, wind or water renders it the only way of filling a basket. That the down stream style will fill a basket on certain days is undeniable, and thirty years ago it was in general use. Fortunately for the stock of trout in many rivers they only come to the downstream lure for a few weeks in early spring with that wonderful freedom which old-fashioned anglers love to recount. I have seen a three days' take of ninety fish fall to one rod in March, more than half of which were dark little eely things of four or six ounces which should never have been killed. On such days as these it is probable that nearly every fish that saw the flies tried for them and one can quite credit tales of three being taken on a cast. Two will occur at times, in which case secure the end fish first, as the fellow on the dropper can still be played from the net if he proves lively, whereas should the dropper fish be in the net, the end one can at once get a sharp pull on taut gut and manage his own release.

If after a day or two of down streaming the water fines and the wind drops, or still better gives place to sharp showers and sunny intervals, change your tactics and fish up stream casting up-and-across and be ready to strike at

any rise or suspicion of a movement near your fly. The dropper is very likely to account for a yellow half-pounder, and great will be your joy at your first experience of a fish caught in this method. You will feel that you have had a far greater hand in the capture than in merely holding the rod while the stream trails the fly along for you. Needless to say the amount of casting is trebled as you cannot afford to allow the flies to remain long on the water. Thrown above you either on to rain-dappled stretches of quiet water or into sparkling runs and stickles they travel towards you at a brisk rate, and you cannot allow them to get too close or the line becomes unmanageable to raise, being too slack to respond to the lifting action of the rod.

Upstream casting over rising fish is half-way towards dry fly fishing, and forms a very great advance on the elementary style you have hitherto tried. One fish struck and hooked above you will soon give more pleasure than three which attach themselves below stream. Besides this the upstreamers are as a race considerably better in size. Half and three-quarter pounders will be taken in lieu of medium sized herrings. Facing up stream as all trout do they see no arm-waving angler above them nor do they shy suspiciously as at a fly travelling far slower than the current. Their standpoint shows them a drowned fly travelling at normal pace downstream, and, not detecting the gut attachment, they rise and swallow it. Another obvious advantage the fly when struck is not

pulled out of their mouths but is probably jerked against the corner of the jaw where it takes a firm hold. And lastly the angler is below the fish, able to pull him or rather guide him down with the current instead of having the stream adding its weight to the trout's struggles. How well indeed do large grayling appreciate this advantage, running downstream and setting their broad back fin athwart the fast running water until the angler has to hurry after them with an almost slack line or else risk the break which inevitably follows should a strand of 3 x gut be taken through a bed of weed by an experienced two pounder.

For rivers which in Spring seldom run quite clear and which make their way through red earth or rich loam, receiving at intervals the contents of ditches by the side of ploughed fields, upstream wet fly fishing is probably the most deadly form of angling—leaving worms and minnows out of the question—but in the chalk streams of Hampshire and Wilts where the water runs over a grey-white bottom and is often as clear as Apollinaris, and not unlike it in brilliant sparkle, the dry fly process leaves any other far behind. To the question of the novice 'What is dry fly fishing, and how does it differ from any other kind of angling"? the answer is simple. In the first place it consists of trying to induce a particular fish already noticed as having risen at surface flies to be deceived into taking an artificial which floats over him, sitting as it were upon the water

ready to fly away again just as live ones are accustomed to do.

In a chalk stream moreover, owing to the clearness of the water and often the absence of cover, it is a matter of some difficulty to approach near enough to the fish—of course from below him—to be able to make the cast without his detecting the movement of arm or rod, and without any unseemly splash of the gut. It is therefore of the greatest importance, sometimes even a *sine qua non,* that the fly should be placed lightly in the exact position about a foot or two above him *at the first cast.*

To do this means that the distance must be judged to a nicety, wind or no wind, and the cast be made with neatness and precision, so that the little fly whether hackled or winged pitches upon the water and floats down in full view of the angler as well as of the fish. As soon as it passes over the rise, and is not taken, it is whipped off the surface and dried or kept dry by false casts made in the air two or three times. This ensures its floating; in which process it can be aided by having its wings and hackle slightly water proofed by a *soupçon* of odourless paraffin oil, or failing that of vaseline. Even a pinch of one's fingers upon the dry fly after rubbing them through one's hair will assist should nothing else be handy.

As many good fish will at certain times of the day any year, only take live floating flies—indeed the most knowing of them nowadays will only take live floating struggling flies—

and will allow all sunken or semi-sunken food to pass, it follows that the man who can imitate the live insect by placing an artificial fly so as to actually sit upon the water and can throw it so that it floats down without drag at just the *natural pace of the current* will succeed in deceiving a fish where other devices have failed.

It is as a rule not wise, however neatly one may cast, to throw more than three times over a trout. If he takes no notice the best plan is to wait and watch him feed again. During this time the pattern of the fly can be quickly changed; and if this change takes the form of a smaller fly so much the better.

One of the great pleasures, and distinctions, of this method is that the angler sees the whole process. Often he sees the dim outline of the fish in the water, and often making his cast can watch the fly alight and see the actual movement of the trout as it rises to seize it. The fly disappears, and as the fish turns down after taking it the strike is made by slightly lifting the rod. Then follows the great reward; or the extreme disappointment of a check, a struggle and the sickening sensation of a slack line almost hitting you in the face, sometimes with the hook intact, sometimes with barb gone, and sometimes with gut severed at the eye, having been worn thin by frequent casting, or frayed by contact with weed on the waters in front or the meadows behind.

A very common experience of those who have

not learned to throw well or who cannot disguise their movements while casting is to find that they have 'put the fish down.' Something has caught his eye, or aroused his suspicions—perhaps a friend from below running up stream and calling out the news—and his form, or his furrow, can be detected as he moves away.

Or if in deeper water he merely drops under the nearest weed bed, and ceases all surface feeding. In either case it is no good continuing to cast.

A man thoroughly bitten by dry fly fishing—a purist in fact—never throws on chance; indeed he does not throw over a fish he sees or knows to inhabit a certain spot. He looks out for a rising fish and casts for it alone—sometimes devotes an hour to it, and generally ends by pricking, hooking, or getting it.

Without attempting to belittle wet fly fishing, clear water worming, or spinning a minnow, all of which require just as much art, science and practice as throwing a dry fly—and which in addition demand a far superior knowledge of the habits of fish at all different seasons—this latter process appeals to me, and many, as by far the most pleasurable.

Occasionally, it is the only way of catching trout or grayling in club waters. When executed well over a feeding fish it more often succeeds than fails to deceive him; and, should the strike be equally well judged and everything hold until his weight is felt in the net as he is lifted well over the bank and dumped

on the grass, the cup of satisfaction is filled to the brim with no after taste of fluke or unfairness. One more advantage can be cited, that as a rule one can make an accurate guess of the size of a rising fish and so devote time, energy and skill to one worth basketing.

A dry fly man on rivers where pounders are rare is more likely to have one in his creel than any down stream angler, or than his fellows who fish wet, unless they have great experience of the water, like that acquired by residents after a dozen seasons. He often captures trout or grayling from close under his own bank, perhaps in quite shallow water, which the less guarded approach of the wet fly fisherman might scare into its holt. And lastly occasionally—notably on a hot July afternoon when good fish are midging under bushes in sluggish water—will bring back a basket of half-a-dozen fine trout when other rods have declared that the fish will take nothing.

There is the reverse I know: the dry fly man, as he describes himself, sage, sour, and superior—with nothing in his creel—highly critical of all other methods but his own, almost thanking goodness that he has caught nothing, sitting alongside a genial angler who says he prefers a wet fly and produces two brace of trout whose tastes had sympathised with his own.

APPROACHING THE WATER.

THE APPROACH—THE RISE—A TROUT'S POWER OF VISION—AN OLD HAND—A YOUTHFUL EXPERIENCE.

THAT trout have eyes "all the better to see you with," like the wolf in Red Riding Hood, is a fact which non-anglers either disregard or are in utter ignorance of. Take the average man out for a stroll along a river bank, either alone or with the girl of his weekly choice, and watch his behaviour on meeting a fisherman. He has perhaps never seen a fish taken on a fly and having time to spare, whether the girl has or not, and feeling a certain amount of interest in sport he naturally thinks he would not only like to see the thing done, but determines that, being on the free list, he may also as well be in the front row of the stalls on this his first night.

He accordingly sidles up alongside the river bank some half-dozen yards above the angler—the girl is standing on oosey ground and indoor

shoes, comfortably out of view of the stage—so that he may be exactly parallel to the rise which she has been sharp enough to detect.

As the fly reaches the water, provided the misguided 'rod' essays one or more throws before the fish is permanently put down—he peers forward so as to miss nothing, and after the cast is made and the line reeled in he regards the angler with something akin to disgust at not continuing to throw. He sees him spike the rod, and considers that slow filling of a pipe as a selfish and unfriendly act. Perhaps he imparts the information that 'it was a fish he is sure,' or perhaps he strides off as much as to say 'I shouldn't grudge letting you see me catch a trout if our positions were reversed.'

Now for the matter from the angler's standpoint. He has waited for twenty minutes watching a certain fish—a good one he thinks, rising occasionally and shyly below a clump of celery weed. He has made a short detour in the meadow so as to get well below him. He has approached the edge of the water on his knees and gradually crouched into position as though he were a housebreaker peering into a dining room window. He has measured the distance and already made a cautious cast or two, one of which the fish half rose at.

He has rested that trout a few minutes and is just about to throw again, when he is suddenly made aware of an intrusive man standing above him and approaching at full height to the very margin of the rushes. The trout must

already have seen him and bolted under the weed with an appetite for surface food thoroughly sated and a fright that may last an hour. The angler, disgusted and disappointed, makes a despairing cast at the spot and reels up his line resignedly, mentally wondering how any man with eyes in his head can be so wanting in discernment as to suppose that the fish cannot see also.

I remember two sharp looking boys playing this trick to me on the Itchen, and as they looked keen and intelligent and might be about the bank every day I tried to put the matter clearly before them. 'Have you boys ever trapped birds'? 'Yes,' they had, indeed they had. 'Well, if you had a sieve trap and one of you stood twenty yards off with a long string in your hand to pull it with, would you' —looking at the other boy—'go and stand right up alongside the sieve to see the birds go under it'? 'Noo, he wouldn't, he knew better than that.' 'Then you may be quite sure that these trout have just as good eyes as birds, and you have spoilt all my chance of catching that fish this morning.' They took it well and seemed decently sorry. Anyhow they never resented it by stone throwing.

It can never be waste of time to approach the bank cautiously, more particularly if the rod has to be put together, which may mean a quiet quarter-of-an-hour very useful for observation, from a point some yards back in the meadow. To stand on a grassy knoll, or to sit on an

overhanging stile at the extreme edge of the water with arms necessarily waving as one threads the line through the rings of the spiked rod—or still worse with one's shadow extending in the form of a moving black bogey right across the stream, is of course to proclaim aloud to all the trout of over six inches that their enemy has appeared and is about to distribute his barbed confetti for their patronage.

To start fishing after such a beginning by steadily walking up stream, tramping perhaps heavily through the rushes and making the boggy and fibrous bank tremble, as it will do for some feet ahead, and to throw at intervals on the chuck and chance it principle, is to raise the hue and cry twenty yards afield for a mile at a time.

And yet how many of us have done this, and how many hundreds more will continue to do it; and then after a trudge of four miles occupying six hours along a stretch of good water, will return home with semi-blistered palm and aching heart to show two little herring-like trout, deficient probably in sight and intelligence, which are just over the limit.

At the station, or the hotel, such a man will meet—we all have met—a middle-aged taciturn angler who was at that time sitting moodily watching the water from ten yards back in the bracken. 'It has been a wretched day' we remark with assumed cheerfulness, 'the fish will take nothing. I have only got two, and my friend has hardly had a touch.

Have you done anything'? 'Just look at this.' The moody man had opened his creel and lifts out number one. 'About three-quarters,' he grunts. Number two follows. 'A trifle over,' he continues; 'that,' referring to number three, 'I hope is a pounder.' Several more of eight, nine, and ten ounces and last but one a thick dark fellow with the scar of a heron's bill on his side 'that's my best, one pound seven do you think? just six brace.'

Where did he get them?—oh just in the large meadow below the weir. Any marvellous fly unknown to hotel visitors? 'No—small blue quill and red upright.' And, he might have added, if he had wanted to be sarcastic, 'an intelligent approach to the water.'

The excited feeling of wanting to get to work at once is natural and excusable. The only objection to it is that it does not pay. By taking the precaution of putting up your rod leisurely in some position where, without showing yourself you can obtain a fair view upstream, especially of the bend close under your own bank, you may begin the day or the evening well, rising hooking and landing a tidy fish within the first quarter hour and by so doing may put your eye, hand, and temperament into that state of good form which is so suitable for catching more fish. A contrary state of mind is fatal. I mean when one begins badly and becomes careless and almost testy gradually tending toward Charles Keene's purple faced gentleman who cast his fly book into the river

for the infernal fish to choose a pattern for themselves.

There is one point about the dry fly fisherman, perhaps in his favour, that in addition to having learned to cast he has also learned not to cast. This alone takes seasons of practice, and accounts for many a good capture.

That impatient laceration of the water preserves a fishing better than any keeper can. Turn three duffers on to your favourite stretch day after day, and you will have more head of pounders in the river at the month's end than if one expert were given two days a week. Owners know this thoroughly well, and, feeling they can afford to give permits freely to certain friends, are thus enabled to decline them to others on the score that the available days are already booked up. So there at least is a handicap in favour of the beginner with the rod—which a beginner with the gun would never have—the owners treat him kindly, letting him scare their best trout with casts that make a wake like a towline.

If in the foregoing lines a hint has been given of what not to do, it may be as well to add some of a more positive character. Let us assume you arrive at the ladder-stile leading down to the river at seven o'clock on a cloudless June or July evening. The path runs straight to a small plank bridge braced by a steel wire, to prevent it wobbling under the weight of the girl with the butter basket who has just crossed it. Now do not imitate her.

To set foot on that bridge would be equivalent to whispering the word 'Tecs' among a friendly gang of pickpockets.

You are going to put up your rod. There is a small brook running into the river at right angles twenty yards below the bridge pool. [How well can I see the place in my mind's eye—and myself, ten years younger, with beating heart nervously and hurriedly fastening cast to line and fly to cast, while peering over the tangled bushes which afford the only cover at the glistening water above.] That is the place to select, and having got all ready, crouch down among the low rushes in the mud with your rod on half cock, and watch the small run where the brook or ditch discharges its trickle into the main stream.

There is no hurry. If feeling impatient begin upon your sandwiches: you may be too busy to eat them later on in the flush of the evening rise or when you feel really hungry. From where you are you have access to quite a stretch of likely water and it may not be ten minutes before a rise occurs close in to your own bank, in a tiny runnel not a foot deep. Keep low, sit upon your heels, and let your rod begin that rhythmical sway with ever-increasing line pulled off the reel by your left hand, which will suffice to place the fly above the fish. It is successful or not as the case may be. Let us suppose not and that the trout goes off, leaving a warning furrow across the pool.

The spell is broken, you must try above the bridge, and remember to again execute a prudent approach by keeping back in the field among the sheep and coming up to the bank behind the next high tuft of grass.

Once *in situ* keep quiet again. Within easy casting distance are perhaps half-a-dozen trout, mostly over ten ounces, any three of which you may pick out within the next half-hour. Does half-an-hour seem a long time? It may; but do not forget the last occasion when you fished that meadow a year ago when you pressed on and on right up the quarter-mile stretch, and—got nothing before the evening rise. As it is, if two or three goodish fish are basketed before 8.30 you will have done creditably. You may get more; you may even get into a pounder at the extreme top of the next stickle by throwing far over the eddy into the circling backwater the other side where the bushes overhang. Don't stand up, and don't hurry. To an angler accustomed to fish in coloured water all this sounds poor fun, slavery, but under the conditions cited it is the only way to catch trout, and sooner or later you like myself will find it so.

As regards learning to approach the water well it is an advantage to begin one's education in June rather than in March or April. For all future pleasure it will scarcely be denied that it is best to learn to play the game, and practise upstream fishing, with wet or dry fly, rather than merely adopt the vocation of a creel

filler and make a feature of a turbid spring water, when trout will occasionally come to a downstream cast and its three flies in a way that proves this process to be the most killing lure. Even with this method great individualism is shown. There is far more in it than the dry fly purist can ever imagine: let him try it for a week and he will be quite convinced when he comes to compare baskets with the native cracks. One man at the end of an hour has his two or three brace while another has nothing to show, due perhaps to the former keeping more out of sight of the fish which are of course all facing the angler.

Some men are quite annoyed at the thought that the fish can see them, and plainly state that if they cannot walk as they please without stooping and crawling they prefer to wait for a thicker water and use a minnow. Many others again, either of an antiquated, lazy, or uneducated school, rarely attempt up stream fishing at all. They can fill their basket to overflowing on their own particular days in March and April and after that they simply do not go out. Such niceties as bothering about a proper approach to the water are beneath their dignity, or are regarded much as the old farmer, accustomed to plain cattle shed stuff, expressed himself on the subject of artificial manures when he said he didn't believe in putting pinches of snuff into wheatfields.

I know the argument that to be a good all round angler, or a good all round the year

angler, it is necessary to vary the process, and that the object of fishing, even fly fishing, is to catch the most in a fair manner.

This sounds unanswerable; although the lessee of a river may well take exception to the statement and amend it by saying the object is to so manage that he and his friends can 'expect to obtain an equal share of sport each succeeding year without restocking.'

To adopt dry fly fishing becomes therefore in such a case a method of preserving somewhat akin to the shooting of no hen pheasants during the latter part of the season. With me the pleasure of downstream fishing did not last: so that while admitting all its difficulty, and the greater water knowledge it undoubtedly shows, as proved by the old hands doing so well, I would advise all beginners to discard it after their first two seasons and resolutely set their backs to the sea and fish upstream on all days when the wind renders it feasible.

THE DIPPER.

[*Cinclus aquaticus*].

> The Fulmar Petrel lays but one egg; yet it is believed to be the most numerous bird in the world.
>
> DARWIN.

> As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of a distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life.
>
> DARWIN.

I FEEL sure that if ever human ingenuity can devise a clockwork or electric bird to bob up and down, to fly—either in the air or under water—and to sing; the result will approximate the form and movements of the common dipper or water ousel more than any other bird that is known in England.

Everything about the bird is mechanical. Its song could be nearly produced by a wet cork on a window pane, and its two screamy notes—uttered on the wing—are far more artificial than those of the kingfisher or sandpiper, who fly past one in much the same hurried manner; generally in pairs, and at much the same height above the water. The note of the sandpiper seems to come from a clarinet; while the squeal of the kingfisher, or the squeak of the

dipper, recall experiences of moving heavy furniture or opening rusty shears.

When first one begins to learn trout fishing the dipper may make our acquaintance. Unnoticed as he perhaps is during the first ten minutes of our casting across the fast water on an open March day, he soon catches the eye; and the tyro with the rod becomes aware of a dark slaty grey or a light sooty black bird with a white breast sitting on a wet stone just the other side of the run some few inches above the water, who seems wound up to make a certain fixed number of bobs at intervals.

He is like a schoolboy somewhat watershy, who has undressed and is standing at the edge of the swimming bath constantly gesticulating with his hands and knees as though about to take a splendid header, and who still remains in position. The dipper always appears about to fly off or about to take a header, and yet stops on his stone as though intending to wait and see a fish caught before he takes action.

He is to the angler what the robin is to the gardener, and in the friendly position he takes up says, like Laura, 'so long as you are pleased to stare I'm pleased to stay.' And if you cast too close to him he at length winds his internal machinery up for flight and whirrs off like an aeroplane down stream or upstream—never in any other direction, cutting never even off a corner if the river makes a sharp bend, and alights upon a similar stone two hundred yards away to recommence his twitchy

watchfulness up that stretch of water which he and his mate have leased from nature for the season.

Every trout fisherman must notice how each quarter of a mile of water contains its pair of ousels. They are as jealous of their beat as policemen and hold themselves aloof from all relations, flying their two hundred yards up or down stream from their favourite central stone just opposite the rocky cascade which they have settled upon as their nesting place. It would be interesting to know and to trace precisely what becomes of the new brood when once the parents are persuaded that the time has arrived for their progeny to be sent out into the world. The beats above may be taken by their uncles or by their cousins once removed, and also the beat below. Do they seek another stream or do they actually combat with their own parents for the possession of that length of water where they first tasted the sweets of caddis worms shrimps or snails? I certainly have seen dippers fight. A species of flying warfare mixed with stridulous screams, and possibly these are sharp actions at law after which the title deeds change hands and the water rights with them.

A puzzle which field naturalists have never explained is why should not the dipper be a far commoner species than it is. Two and sometimes three broods a year are hatched, generally successfully, and the average number of eggs laid is four or five. The bird has

hardly any enemies. Even the average schoolboy who spends his Easter holidays close to a stream seldom finds a nest, or if he does locate one sees with regret that it is the other side of the stream under a tangled overhanging bank. Yet the dipper like the nuthatch is often unknown to those who take suburban walks, and is even spoken of as an unfamiliar bird.

The starling rears as a rule but one brood. It is shot at by every cockney sportsman who can borrow a gun. Its nest is rifled by mere urchins and its young becomes a prey to any cat or catapult in the district. Yet countless flocks are seen, and the bird is reckoned as common as the hedge sparrow. We have all found dead thrushes or starlings on many a winter's walk. I have never seen a dead dipper on the sandy beach of any stream nor have I ever seen the bird attacked. The nuthatch also enjoys an immunity from birdsnesting boys and must rear its young with comparative success year after year, yet how few are seen excepting by those who really set out to look for them. The balance of nature so admirably kept in hand is hard to analyse.

In the case of the dipper there is a statement in Morris' British Birds to the effect that "one pair—or at least a pair—built in the same place for thirty one years, rearing three broods each year." Can they have reared three hundred young during that period? If so then their descendants would be sufficient to monopolise a river valley of ten or fifteen miles. No one

probably has seen fifty dippers in the whole length of Dovedale. I have not seen twenty.

Many of the best days fishing have been secured by an angler who takes an interest in watching the habits of a dipper. Tired of walking along on a ruffled day in April, casting up stream every yard of the way upon the Scotch principle that the fly which catches the most fish is the one oftenest upon the water, he at length spears his rod with an impatient jerk into the wet grass, makes a cushion of his mackintosh and plumps himself down on it determined to knock off for a space and smoke a consoling pipe. He sees a small bird fly off a stone and deliberately attempt suicide by drowning.

He wonders if like Alice and the rabbit he has been dreaming; but his interest is aroused and he finds himself too absorbed to fill his pipe. He watches the dipper flutter right into the sparkling stickle and behave like the penguins in the Zoological Gardens, swimming, diving, and almost running under water in search of food. If he keeps unobserved he can in the space of half-an-hour become a witness of most of its life's history, and will in addition be rewarded by noticing a brace of good fish rising almost within casting distance. Without getting up, he reaches for the rod, places a red upright a foot above the rise, and to his unexpected delight finds it well taken and the fish hooked before he has risen to his knees. He plays him carefully, backing down stream

with shortening line and rod well up, and after guiding him past an ugly strand of blackberry slips the net underneath and lifts out a curvetting ten ouncer as bright as yellow amber.

Thus we are all wooed from the cast-on-chance principle towards the methods of dry fly, or at least of only fishing for the rise. The pleasant interlude of watching the dipper has taught the angler that the successful basket filler is he who is most often sitting on the bank, not too close to the edge, with grounded rod, gazing at, instead of constantly thrashing, the stream.

The nest of the dipper is difficult to see but easy to trace by watching the movements of the birds. Towards the end of April they lose much of their shyness and gradually betray the close whereabouts of their bulky home. The nest itself is usually some five feet above the ground or water, in the opposite bank among the bared roots of a tree. It looks at first like a lump of *debris* left stranded by flood water. Generally it is found just out of reach and requires a boat or a bridge to get at it. I have located scores which followed this description; but often again it can be found under an old bridge and even among the fir trunks that are laid to form a weir.

Among wet rocks near a dam or a waterfall is another favourite locality. The nest is something between a wren's and a housesparrow's: occasionally very large and straggly, covered with a dome always and with the entrance hole at the side, lined carefully with oak or beech

leaves, dried grass and bits of river weed in preference to hair or feathers. Indeed the two latter I have never noticed. The eggs are plain white, four or five in number; usually found the second week of April in Devonshire, or a week later in Yorkshire.

So frequently do they pass and repass that I have touched them with the line in casting; and have known of one being hooked foul in the wing by an angler, and brought to bank after diving furiously.

A WOODLAND MURDER.

.....timebis.
Et motæ ad lunam trepidabis arundinis umbram.
JUV.

Plumamque nocturnæ strigis.
HOR.

AS you remember how we always made a point of stopping far later up the river on the longest day, ever since that memorable occasion when you caught the four pound three ounce peal at half past ten, you will be interested in hearing of a small adventure—or rather experience—that befel me a few nights ago.

Having tried all the morning the dark still water under the red rock and only succeeded in pricking two tidy fish by the folly of striking too soon, I did not feel much inclined to continue all day. Fortunately however after a lazy afternoon there seemed something in the look of the weather at tea time which aroused all the old keenness for that walk which you and I know so well; and I set out by myself up the water blank or no blank.

I will not describe the tramp along the marshes and the regret felt at being alone. I saw nothing of consequence either of bird or

fish life, and was fairly hot—in rubber boots—before I reached the footbridge and looked over at the small but rich preserve above, with the familiar Naboth-like longing. The river was as still as a pond, and not a fish was moving although there were clouds of fly in evidence. As the sun sank behind the fir clump, the whole air turned into one of those evenings we have often remarked on, when the atmosphere seems filled with golden dust. And indeed, as far as fishing went, it proved just as unfavourable.

Wading over to the patch of watercress above salmon pool I peeped through the dry reeds into 'the pocket,' and was pleased to notice a good fish rise three or four times. It is a poor chance to do much with a dry fly down stream, but for a wonder he took it just before it began to drag: and I had him. He was thirteen ounces as it turned out, and fought well, bolting right under the sycamore and obliging me to cross the river—of course playing him from above all the time. Well, not another thing could I touch. The flies were literally in myriads but what the fish were taking during all the evening rise they would not tell, and the result was that by the time I finished up at ivy pool it was well past ten.

The moon was up, and a fine brown owl flew out of the trees and circled close over my head—and then its mate. I was so startled for a moment that I stopped throwing and watched to see them alight, and could just make out one sitting on a broad lateral branch exactly

opposite. They both passed again, and a few seconds afterwards there was a furious rustling in a dense ivy clad stump and screams from two blackbirds, which scolded and cried louder than I have ever heard them before. I saw one owl pass against the light sky, and, from the dreadful noise the poor blackbirds were making, I could tell that one of their nearly fledged young ones had been taken out of the nest by the owls. Standing in the water in the dark like that it made me feel almost frightened, and although an occasional rise took place, it quite put me off fishing.

After perhaps five minutes of crying and commotion all was quiet again, and I supposed the poor birds had got over their trouble. I was just thinking of coming out of the water to reel up when, again, just the shadow of an owl's wings and the same horrible rustling at the blackbirds' nest. This time it seemed worse. I could hear the young birds cheeping between the frantic calls of the two parents. Both the owls passed up to the taller trees on the left, and the wretched blackbirds quieted down. I was determined to try and stop the owls if they came again, but the trees were too high for a stone to do much good, and before I had decided how even to try they were back at the nest. This time the blackbirds appeared more dazed or frightened, as they cried in now a despairing manner, and from the tearing and scuffling of wings that took place in the ivy I think that the remaining young birds were taken.

One it seemed fell down out of the nest to the foot of the stump as the parents were making their continuous noise almost on the ground among the high grass of the steep bank. It all appeared such a dastardly and cowardly murder that it made me long for a gun to shoot the owls.

After the final visit it must have been getting on for eleven, as it was past twelve by the time I reached home and weighed the one trout in the kitchen. The whole way back I felt exactly as though I had really witnessed a murder. You know the feelings walking home alone when the river looks and sounds so deep and all one's sins rise up out of the water, like amorphous ghosts, and make you afraid to step into what you know is only a shallow lest it prove the bottomless pit:—when the quiet stretch of two foot water, embordered by the dark fringe of rushes, becomes the tarn of the House of Usher; and the gurgle of the stream, and of the nightjar, blend into the suggested sound of those huge winged mysterious dragon flies that flutter up in a cloud out of the earth and then sink back again, in the crescendoes and cadences of Wagner's music.

This pair of owls were not here last year. Whether their species are always such marauders I do not know, but am pretty sure the white owl, which beats over the meadow precisely at sunset, is not in the habit of tearing young roosting birds out of their nest under the eyes and wings of their distracted parents. Nature

is cruel indeed. One would not mind so much in the day time, and with adult animals, the one preying upon the other. Even the heron and the trout cannot but be justified by any angler seeing that he is doing the same thing. Fish however do not look after their young unless it be to eat them; but for these blackbirds to have had their home destroyed does seem unnecessarily hard. Yet it must take place nightly somewhere, and in the present instance I am fairly sure from the way the two owls returned to the large oak tree on which I first saw them that they were accompanied by their own young ones, especially as there was a slight metallic noise which probably came from a hungry family.

Both parent owls were noiseless. They uttered none of their Hoo-Hoo-Hoots recalling to memory a winter night in the New Forest when I went out after supper to gather moss for a wreath we were making for my uncle's grave. The constant hoots of the brown owl alternating with the scream of the barn owl could be heard all around us in the forest, and more than once we saw them pass among the giant oaks. Their cries were a fitting dirge.

* * * * * *

I remember finding the nest of the Brown owl some years ago in a rabbit burrow on the edge of the red cliff, half a mile lower down the river, in that patch of brushwood near the cart bridge. They were large eggs, white and smooth and round—two of them the first day

and three the next. This was in the first week of April 1898.

One of the fishermen, who nets the river, told me he has seen a brown owl try to take fish and had watched them gliding close to the water; so it would seem that trout may have other enemies besides you and I, the heron and the otter, to keep them wary at night. Of course a close inspection of their regurgitated pellets would soon settle the point. Gilbert White says the young will eat any carrion or offal that may be brought, and are therefore not exacting—like barn owlets—as to their food being freshly killed.

DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES.

He makes a mayfly to a miracle, and has furnished half the country-side with angle rods.

SPECTATOR, 1711.

ALTHOUGH the rising generation of trout and grayling are justly credited with being far in advance of their ancestors of two hundred years ago, when the lines at the heading of this chapter were written, it must be admitted as a counterpoise that modern gut and flies have been brought to something very like perfection. I have never mounted a fly upon a cast plucked from the tail of a white stallion—a recipe one reads in old angling books—so whether Hercules casts are better than this I cannot say, but they offer little to be desired, and are made in a variety which must satisfy the most exacting dry fly fisherman.

Drawn or Undrawn Gut.

'That is the question.' Indeed a parody could be written upon this vexed soliloquy by men who have either failed to rise a shy trout by using too stout a cast of undrawn gut,

or have been broken by the only two pounder they ever hooked owing to the fineness of their 3 x point.

You will find yourself inclined to hold a brief for either side of this important controversy exactly as your recent experience of success or disaster prompts you to speak. And your shifting views will generally be warmly opposed by a counsel in waders on every occasion. Upon the principle that whether you marry or whether you don't you are sure to regret it, so the dogmatic man, who makes an iron rule with respect to drawn or undrawn gut, is bound to have opposing evidence thrust upon him in the form of disappointing blank days, or of exasperating smashings.

Take the case of undrawn namely natural gut first. No one will deny that, however well soaked it may be, it will not and cannot drop a small fly upon the water with anything like softness. Nor will it as a rule allow the fly to ride upon the surface with the natural ease so often necessary to deceive fish in a clear water. The obvious result is that when small flies of any particular pattern are proving successful, the men who use undrawn gut are hardly able to move a fish, while their fellow anglers have basketed two or three brace.

But now change the conditions to days when a mayfly, an alder, a Welshman's button, or a sedge, are the flies to put up; when the fish run larger and the water is weedy. What is the result? The undrawn gut not only stands the

strain of the constant casting with the heavier fly; but it enables the strike to be made with more decision, and gives a confidence in playing and guiding through weeds where drawn gut so frequently fails.

With trout, the question practically resolves itself into one of size of fish and state of water. In Hampshire, where the keepable limit usually varies from three quarters of a pound to a pound, and where at certain seasons weeds and celery beds are prevalent, undrawn gut is far the best to keep to, especially from mid-May onwards. On rivers and streams where the limit is expressed in inches—eight, nine, or ten—or where the water is gravelly and free from all obstacles, the advantages of drawn gut are beyond all cavil.

With a really good 3 x point no one should be broken by any trout of under a pound in open water.

If the parting occurs with the strike, then this has been made clumsily; from too stiff a check on the reel, or from a line held too tightly by the hand. Where the break occurs later on, it is probably owing to the fish being allowed to get into a strong current below the angler, to the cast being touched by the rim of the net just when it is taut, or to its hitching up in a bush or rushes close to the bank. In any event it means, seven times out of ten, bad management more than what can be fairly termed bad luck.

Again, a windy day introduces a new element

even where fish are small, for then the drawn points mean the cracking off of the fly at times when the angler can scarcely blame himself for making too quick a recovery. As moreover on such days there must necessarily be a ripple on the water, often sufficient to half drown the fly, the nicety of casting is less important and consequently the natural gut cast is a distinct advantage.

For evening fishing too, meaning by that when it is too dark to be able to see your fly upon the water, or when you have mounted a somewhat larger bodied pattern, drawn gut is a mistake, a snare, and a delusion; as it seldom stands a touch from a branch or a stake when it is occupied in its proper vocation of hauling a struggling trout over the edge of the net, or of lifting its head and shoulders clean out of the water, so often the only alternative under the dark shade of a steep and grassy bank, or while craning over on one's stomach on the top of camp shedding. To lose a really good fish after a poor day at such a time when you have actually counted him as your own, and thought how his contour will cause envy and admiration at the inn bar, seems to take years off one's life.

The Treatment of Gut.

I have rather put the cart before the horse by speaking first of soaked gut in action rather than of how to treat it before it comes to the river bank.

In cases where you only get a fortnight's

holiday a year to devote to fishing, it will be best to buy complete made up casts of nine foot lengths, which should be sold each in a separate transparent paper envelope on which their exact description is entered such as 'stout to finest undrawn,' 'medium to 3x' *et cet.*

Among the many appliances now offered to anglers, a tin cast box containing loose felt or flannel for damping purposes can be bought for a shilling, and a couple of casts should be put into it to soak for some hours as well as several fine points. This soaking must not be continuous day and night or the gut will become too sodden and rotten. The cast kept in reserve during the day in the box can be taken out and allowed to dry on blotting paper each evening.

Soaked gut is not only more elastic and consequently far stronger, but in that condition alone is suitable for any kind of knotting, or for the mounting of flies. So much has gut improved of late years that it is now quite easy to buy points of sixteen and eighteen inches varying from those which are perfectly natural—namely have never been passed through the drawer and have consequently a certain spiral twist on them—and are strong enough to manage a two and a half pounder among weeds, to almost gossamer gut of 4x and 6x which may be used for grayling in gin clear water on a chalk bottom who need the wiles and accessories of an angling artist to be attracted to the surface.

As to the proper time and place for attaching flies to gut opinions must always differ; but the plan of doing so in cool blood indoors before the breakfast things have been cleared away, may at any rate be tried. It is more extravagant of gut certainly, as such mounted flies kept in a damp box, or still better in the damp flannel fold of a flap cap, are bound to become either rotten as to their gut or rusty in their barbs, and must be sacrificed from sheer economy in the matter of breaks.

Where you know your water, and have quite made up your mind irrespective of local advice as to what patterns you intend to use or try, the threading process at the breakfast table is useful and interesting. The points have of course been soaked the evening before, so that fastening the fly becomes not only a leisurely process but is attended to with a care and nicety that minimises accident at the bank side. It is a satisfactory plan to look at the knot through a pocket magnifying glass, and see that it has fallen into its place rightly, whether you use the Turle or the double-jamb knot.

The possession of half a dozen of such flies mounted for immediate use, makes the change of pattern an easier, quicker, and safer process when executed in the presence—we will not say in the sight of—a readily rising fish. There is then no attempted threading of a semi-blind eye in a biting wind or a pattering shower, with its risk of snipping off some of the wing or hackle with the scissors.

The Strike.

Having attempted to compromise the controversy upon gut drawn or undrawn, it is no use shirking the still more important one of when and how to effect the strike. Fishing, as we all of us must often do in full view of that professional bystander, whose occupation is to spend his eight hour day upon the bank giving advice to amateur anglers, who could manage to dispense with his company, one cannot avoid remembering the remarks thus occasionally volunteered: that 'you were not quick enough'; and that 'the gentleman down here last week never missed a fish.'

Still, it is not only bankside Jeremiahs who advocate this desperate quickness in striking; for I see in the '*House on Sport*' that a fellow member, after upwards of ten years experience on the Test, gives the advice to strike as quickly as you possibly can. It is obvious therefore that the practice must have much to recommend it; and in the case of grayling I agree unreservedly.

With trout, especially fair sized trout, my own opinion tends to dissent; for, bearing scores of cases in mind where I have failed to hold a fish after the strike, I believe that it has more often been due to the hurried than the leisurely practice. Two friends of mine, whose knowledge and experience are equal to anyone's, took pains to test the time occupied by several trout in the process of rejecting an artificial fly, and came to the conclusion that extreme quickness

of strike was not nearly so effective as allowing time for the fish to turn down after he had risen and taken it.

In making these experiments the one stood upon a plank bridge just above the rising fish, while the other threw floating flies over them from a down stream position, and delayed making the strike until he was told to do so.

That was on a Devonshire river in quiet and clear water. To give him time to close his mouth upon the fly therefore sounds reasonable under similar conditions. Of course in a cross-stream cast with a long line out, the immediate strike cannot be immediately communicated to the fly, so that 'the time to close his mouth upon it' is given by the straightening of the sag on the line as it is lifted from its curve in the current.

In casting for a trout rising above one, a first class rod on the Itchen gave me his recipe, which was that as he always fished from a kneeling position he made a practice of rising to his feet directly his fly was taken, and striking as he did so. For several seasons I have acted upon this advice and can recommend it as a plan to adopt. Everyone will probably agree that large fish rise more slowly than small ones; so that if the pause between the rise and the strike often results in losing the fish, there is a satisfaction in knowing, or even in thinking, that it is the smaller ones which escape.

Better allow two half pounders to reject your black gnat and save their skins, than twitch it

out of the jaws of a pounder whose intention it was to turn down with it first.

After the Strike.

Before touching on the subject of playing and netting, it will be as well to mention the different methods adopted of managing the cast and line just after the strike has been made—and has fastened. Many anglers always strike from the reel: that is to say they have their line taut between the lower ring and the winch; which, having an adjustable check, prevents that break so inevitable to the beginner who keeps his fingers pressed tightly upon the line. Personally I have almost given up this plan of striking from the reel, and prefer to hold a loop of line in my other hand, taking care to keep it well vaselined so that it slips quite lightly between thumb and first finger when striking.

Several advantages can be cited in support of this method, one being that in making the cast the release of the loop causes the line to extend itself better, and thus places the fly more lightly upon the water. Another distinct advantage is that after making a cast upstream you can, by taking hold of the line between the lower ring and the reel, gradually draw it into a loop, and so counteract the action of the stream and keep the line from sinking as the fly travels towards you. This of course enables the strike to be made on a line fairly straight, or assists in picking it off the water far more cleanly after

your fly has passed over the rise without being taken.

Indeed a second and a third loop can be held quite easily, and retained in the hand as you walk upstream keeping the line in the air. With a very little practice a series of loops can be held, until the line beyond the rod point becomes so shortened that you can reach and examine the fly. I find this a far simpler plan, especially when wading, than always winding up from the reel, in spite of the fact that at first it gives some trouble among thistles or coarse grass owing to the loops catching in them.

Should the fly be taken, and the strike be well timed, then the pulse of the situation can be felt far better by the line in the left hand: indeed it is like a rein in the horse's mouth. You can feel what he is doing—almost what he is going to do, whether to bolt or to back.

This the reel cannot impart with the same certainty. If a fish immediately turns and runs down stream towards you, the pulling in of the line in loops, or even allowing it to fall upon the ground, is a quicker process than winding it up. Your hand is already upon the line, and there is no need to shift the rod from one hand to the other. To do this while backing downstream at the same time is the only process I know to keep a firm hand upon the fish and prevent losing touch with him.

After this first rush is over, of course it is advisable to recover the line upon the reel,

although I have frequently netted the fish out before being able to do this. A disadvantage is that in winding up the loops of slack one is apt to overwind them, or to find them lying so untidily on the reel that it necessitates a rewinding before beginning to cast again.

Playing and Netting.

Precisely the same doubts and difficulties arise in the matter of playing a trout after the strike has proved successful. Some anglers accuse others of being too rough. Others accuse some of being too easy and nervous—of allowing a half-winded fish to cruise about and enlarge the hold of the hook until it allows room for the barb to pull through on the slightest slacking of the line.

Circumstances of size or behaviour of the fish on that particular river or season—circumstances of the size of your fly and strength of your tackle—circumstances of weediness of the water, either on the surface or the bottom, or swiftness of the current—circumstances of bushes or rocks below you, or of stakes and obstacles on the far side, must all be taken into account.

There are times and places when it is best to tear your line through the rings, and back into the meadow as fast as you can, and to keep your fish upon the top of the water splashing aimlessly right into the net, rather than allow him to gain his head and take in the desperate situation.

There are times, particularly with grayling,

when it is politic to treat her as a cat does a mouse, to stroll down stream and coax her after you with so little strain on her lips that the pliant rod only shows a gentle curve; to tire her down until she seems waterlogged and lies over on her side even in sight of the net. Grayling exhibit a far greater horror of the landing net than trout, and more are lost at that moment of tension than during their wrigglings and shakings in the deeper water.

To hook and play a fish in a spot where you have hooked and played many a predecessor is an advantage to the angler that cannot be overstated. He knows exactly what the surroundings are, and what is in store for him and his gut twenty yards down stream. No intuition can tell him of a hidden stake; but, if he has once lost a trout under it, he knows where and how to 'hold up' at the right moment.

Do not follow any struggling fish with the net. Sink the net and bring him over it before you try to dip him out.

THE BILLIARD TABLE POOL.

A Red Letter Evening.

MY days on the preserved water that summer were Mondays and Thursdays, so that during the month's holiday there were four days in each week to plan either to put up with the free fishing, or else to devise short trips to other stretches.

The miller had his quarter of a mile, including the still piece above the dam and a few rocky pools below the weir. For this the charge was five shillings a season; and, although it was good enough during wet weather to be worth the eight mile journey there and back, the prospect for a cloudless fortnight in June of getting even a brace of good fish during the daytime was poor in the extreme.

It was however during one of the trips to this miller's water that my good fortune asserted itself—a piece of good fortune which lasted for several seasons on end. Lying on the grass

one hot afternoon building castles in the water of two pound trout and fairy tackle, I heard a step behind me and a man of about forty passed along. We spoke about the usual topics, and it was soon apparent that he knew every yard of the river and had killed more fish upon it than he was able to remember. He said he was going out that evening; and for over an hour we sat on the bank smoking and talking.

Without asking my name or telling me his, he ended by saying I was welcome to fish his meadows, some three quarters of a mile, extending from below the miller's water down to the stone cart bridge. Perhaps he thought this sounded too general an invitation to be acted upon, for he then gave me a card 'has permission to fish Tuesdays and Fridays.' "You will find me there most evenings" he said "but whether or not there is plenty of room for two."

The possession of that card seemed almost too good to be true. Permission is one thing but the card put quite a different pleasure into it. The next morning I arrived at the inn, intending to sleep there that night so as to have every chance of stopping out as long as it was light enough to see a fly.

A drizzly rain after tea time promised a wet evening; and, by some unaccountable reason in strapping on my mackintosh my canvas creel was left at home. It is said to be lucky to forget something, so stuffing two extra hand-

kerchiefs into a pocket I started off in the best spirits. The rain soon stopped: the clouds grew higher, and between six and seven o'clock there was every sign of a fine sunset and a perfectly still evening.

Turning off the railway line, I struck across the gorse meadow, enjoying the swish of the wet bracken against rubber boots, and the sight of the yellow wagtails running after flies in the hot odour of damp cowflanks. No better omen of a good evening rise can be cited than this; the birds often being absent from the meadows for days together, and then congregating among the cattle as though by prearrangement at a particular hour in the afternoon.

Half way down the water there are two dams across the river made of larch trunks, at either end of which were likely looking pools, and after waiting among the dwarf willows for some time my patience was rewarded by a rise. He came at the first cast, a gray quill gnat but let it go by; and the very next time changed his mind and had it well. The moment he felt the strike he was in under the willow roots, and no coaxing or hand lining would move him. After long manœuvring the point frayed and came back minus the fly.

As I was looking for another, my friend the owner came up the meadow and told me he had lost the same fish the previous evening. Our estimate of his weight no doubt did ample justice, but still the fact remains that he was worth anyone's best attention. 'Now you fish

wherever you like, you won't interfere with me I am going above the wire bridge, but if I may give you a hint—with those boots on—you cannot do better than go down to the bridge—you see the wall, and that small grassy island—get across to that—you will find under the wall and in those runs above, the fish will rise well this evening. Hardly anyone goes there—the water is not a foot deep over the rocks between this bank and the island.'

I thanked him and moved down, wondering secretly whether he wanted to get me out of the way; for the tug of that lost fish had rather chained my affection to the larch dams as an evening anchorage. It was nearing half past seven when I made up a new cast on the bridge, keeping my eye on the island during the process. 'Not too small a fly—a ginger quill for choice' he had called after me, and much as the idea of an olive asserted itself, I threaded the ginger quill on to a soaked point and climbed down to the river bank. It was a hackled fly which floated inimitably and looked larger than it really was.

The water parted among some rocks just below the nearest point to the island, and I was just going to step on to one when I made a short cast. It was taken at once and the result was a half pounder jumping on to the stones at my feet with the net clapped on top of him before he could get back. A very little further out two others were rising and one of these was landed.

After trying the other small runs without avail I got from stone to stone on to the island. It was only a few yards long and was covered with coarse tufted grass eight feet high. Shelving stones on one side, banked up by the last flood, gave an insecure foot hold into deepish water: on the other, slab rock formed the higher level of a shallow. It is difficult to refrain from drawing a plan of it with bearings and soundings like the one in Billy Bones' sea chest.

To the right was the stone wall, studded with ferns in the crevices, and under this wall over mossy stones the water ran smoothly and swiftly, perhaps three feet deep, with some eddying holes. Two more fish were taken out of it, but neither was above the eight or nine ounce average. I pushed quietly through the tall wet grass and peered out. Never since I have fished that Devon stream can I recall such a small-world paradise. The whole sky in front was golden sunset and of course the water too, the various runs and channels being merely marked by flecks of lilac. To the right the wall had ended in a fringe of rushes, and the current lapped and murmured down over a slimy green slab of rock covered with weed, to be sucked into creeks and bays below.

Above this was a pool the shape and smoothness of a billiard table; and before looking at it for more than a few minutes, three fish rose repeatedly one exactly above the other. The difficulty was not to show oneself and yet to

get space to make a cast without being hitched up in the long grass behind, but I parted a narrow lane and made just sufficient room to give the rod play. All this time the three fish rose with fascinating persistence, the rings they made changing immediately into a broken oval, which was carried down over the slippery rock.

The lower one was on the baulk spot, hardly two rods lengths away, seemingly taking a fly every few seconds with a vicious snap. Would he catch sight of me and be gone, or would the ginger quill attract him? It pitched two feet above him, a movement, a suck, a violent tug, and he came down towards me over the green weed into the deeper water under the wall. So short was the line after being pulled through the rings that it made the grass bend beneath it, and I had to step back on to the rocks below the island to play him. Round he came held hard, for there was plenty of weed large clumps of dock leaves and other obstacles to catch any slack line. Fortunately I had stood up the net among the grass handy enough for sudden usage, and he came open mouthed over it.

Every second of time was grudged, and while thinking 'you are fully three quarters' as I stepped across and put him on to the bank, my thoughts were with his fellow rising on the pyramid spot. The pleasurable excitement of stepping back into the old position, and again watching for the two other fish to rise, was checked for some minutes by a feeling of

disappointment that their keenness was over, but with the fly between thumb and finger I waited breathlessly. The upper one rose, this time nearer to the rushes, and right under a heavy headed tuft of nightshade which bobbed forward at intervals and caught its crest in the current.

Just as I was thinking of casting for it the trout in the centre rose well, and it was easy to see that his proportions were attractive. He allowed fully half a dozen casts to be made without attention, and then perhaps the seventh time, without a movement, he was on—a splendid 'rug,' a vigorous holding water, and round he came with a rush over the rock, in under the tangle of brushwood at the foot of the wall without a check on the short line, down under the stones of the wall, and round below me among the rocks. It seemed as though something must give way, but it was no use letting him have more rope: he would have hung himself up.

As it was he jumped and churned until the idea of a foul hooking suggested itself. But no, he allowed himself to be reeled in and the net received him kindly. I carried him across the rocks to the bank and unhooked the fly from the extreme edge of his upper lip. Nothing but a break or the flattening of the iron could have saved his skin, and with an exulting feeling I saw he was better than the other and fully fourteen ounces.

A short space more and the billiard table pool was again before me, its smooth glide unbroken

by any rings. The fish that had risen on the spot must be there, and but for the time wasted in landing his rival would no doubt have been secured. Above, in the gravelly shallow fish after fish were feeding, their snouts coming up and leaving a purple semicircle in the auburn of the water. But I watched the rocking nightshade near the top right hand pocket with intentness, and—he was there.

The fly hit the leaves and for a moment the fear of a hitch up added excitement to the situation. Cast after cast followed, far too quickly, but the distance was right, and if only the fly would pitch just as the nightshade rose clear all promised well. It pitched too far out, a foot to the left, but a sideways movement followed and the next instant there was a dark form in the air with a red gold outline—a splash, and a dash up the narrow run leading right among the rushes.

I pressed my finger on the line and held the rod up tightly, hardly daring to think the gut could stand the strain. It did—and the sudden slackening told me that the same course down stream was taking place. Line was on the water, and as I tore it in lay in coils among the high grass and around my feet. He would be off or under the broom bush of course, but a welcome wallop in the pool below showed that so far all was clear. Head and shoulders out of the water he kicked somewhere below me. The net had fallen in the water and in getting it I tripped forward and was on hands and

knees. It seemed impossible to save him and yet I had to try and pull him up chin over the rim of the net.

As I did so something gave way, and only a dark mass of weeds seemed there instead of the trout. I felt inside, he was there, free in the net, swaying and arching in a way that made me afraid to lift it up by the handle lest the knuckle joint should give way. He was mine, upon the bank, carried well up over the stones in a spirit of caution and set down among the nettles before I dared to unchain him: a perfect fish in every way dwarfing the others and fully a pound and a quarter. Coils of line were still round my boot and took some time to adjust but the fly, the ginger quill, was unharmed and its barb as sharp as before.

The time was now eight forty, and the shallows above the island were still dimpled with rising fish. The trio on the bank made quite a warm place in ones heart, and their capture appeared to have occupied only a few minutes. It was now becoming unnecessary to take cover. The whole sky was ablaze in waning sunset so I waded slowly out a few yards above the grass clump where fish were rising well nigh between my feet.

Away to the left in shallow water, lit up by the warm afterglow, a good trout took my fly among the stones, ran up and across the river, jumped high, and vibrated off. He was a twelve ouncer; the last of that size I hooked. Four more, all over nine ounces, were taken,

but at a quarter past nine they stopped, only a few dark rings under the shade of the rushes on the right being made from time to time. The last fish I had to slip into my boot, and it worked down so far that a visit to the bank became necessary. If only the creel were not hanging in the verandah at home what an opening there seemed for picking up two or three lumpers in the dusk.

To get the three prizes into two knotted handkerchiefs and to carry them in one hand was a difficult matter. It was no use putting them into the net; besides its mesh was not too safe, as it had been repaired with common string that afternoon. Hot with excitement, dripping with the various burdens of fish, rod and mackintosh, I thought—perhaps for the first time in my life that I had enough.

Deep 'ploops' sounded from time to time close under my own bank as I stumbled on, and twice I set down the impedimenta and threw for the rising fish. It was a mile and a half to the inn, the nearest way being up the single railway line, so by the time I had laboured over the wire fencing, dropping all three fish in the thistles and the dark, I felt fairly well done up, bathed in perspiration, and desperately hungry. Sitting down on the rails to cool I noticed that nearly every other sleeper was lighted by a glow worm; twenty or thirty I counted on the way back, and although a pair of fern owls were hawking round I never saw one taken. It was nearly eleven before the

inn was reached and the fish laid out on the table and weighed. Each one was above the estimate. A golden day indeed, from water into which not an artificially-bred trout had ever been placed during the hundred odd years that anglers had haunted the stream. How my host had fared that evening I did not know then, but his advice was truly disinterested. He had told me of a veritable Arcadia. Twice again it fell to my good fortune to fish the same place but no such red-letter luck recurred.

A long rest after supper with the battle fought again amid wreaths of smoke—a nirwana of trout lore—brought that day to a close and sent me out down the road to the upper bridge a hundred yards off under the light of a moon but two days past the full. While stepping across the side parapet I saw and heard a rush in a shallow stickle and for a moment thought of salmon. It was a pair of otters who had been lying out in only a few inches of water.

A rustling wake and they were gone. Everybody was gone. The river seemed to be the Kotmali-oya of Ceylon. One o'clock struck: I could keep awake no longer.

So ended a beautiful evening in my angling memory, nor was its beauty mainly attributable to the success of the fly which proved so kind and killing. The rarity of such days—that combination of good sport, fortunate management, and lovely surroundings, makes them stand out the more.

All the penance of blanks and blundering

forms the background of a picture which can be called up at will after any disappointing day, when ones legs and back ache deliciously on the old horse-hair couch of the inn parlour, and the drawling songs of the haymaking yokels percolate through the cracked panes of the tap room door and steal across the creaky passage.

BLANK DAYS.

"And tell of pain as well as gain
That waits us on the morrow."

ERIC MACKAY.

NEWSPAPER articles on fishing, or letters from friends on holiday, almost always speak of success—disappointing and qualified, but still, of success. Downright failure, an utter blank day, is never alluded to in the present tense. It may have taken place last season, or even last week; but it forms no subject matter for a Saturday column, or for a yarn to a brother angler unable to leave town.

And yet, in the early days of fishing, with what dire persistence these blanks occur. To forget about them is best. To slur them over is pardonable: but, in describing angling as it really is, to those who wish to learn all its rites and mysteries, failures and exasperations, one cannot maintain a dishonest silence.

On certain days blanks seem preordained. The total inability to hook, or even attract a fish is not always the fault of the 'rod,' the fly, or the cast; although if trout are rising, it is best to infer that one of the three factors is at

fault. You start badly, perhaps by putting up your rod in too close proximity to the water, and then cast at random expecting like Micawber that something will turn up. You remember an occasion when this happened, and fatuously you continue to walk up the bank casting, when, provided it is not too cold, you had far better sit down and watch the water.

But on some days as we say nothing happens: one is obliged to stroll on. The best plan, if there is no suspicion of a rise in the quieter stretches, is to look out for a place where a fall or a sharp run disturbs the stream and creates eddies, swirls, and backwaters. Here again it is better to wait and watch than to whip the surface at once.

Remember that good trout are especially fond of lying just between the current and the back-wash, in a place where floating or semi-suspended matter will circle slowly round and round among the bubbles.

Good eyes and good observation will usually detect an occasional suck by a trout which is poised at an angle of 45 degrees, and which always at much the same angle allows himself to drift in a three foot circle. When looking at such a place from a bridge on a non-fishing day, or on to a piece of private water, I have often watched a trout for half an hour and counted the number of times that he takes something off the top of the water; and also noticed the false rises he makes, merely bringing his nose within an inch of the surface and then

dropping back as though the object were not worth the effort of opening his mouth.

At intervals a distinct blade like stroke of the tail and a snap would occur, showing how very carefully the floating food is scrutinised and appreciated.

Bearing this experience in mind, I would repeat that it is best as a rule to wait and watch for at least five minutes. But at the same time there is no need to go too close, and failing the sight of any dimple in the water—difficult indeed to see if there is a dancing light—a trial cast must be made. Repeat it foot by foot up the run, not omitting the extreme sides under the projecting willow bushes or brambles. On many and many occasions this cast at random will be successful. The fly disappears—and you have tightened and struck the fish before being aware of it. He bores down hard, you hold him perhaps almost too firmly, and he comes to view with a quivering jump a clear foot out of the water, and seems to shake in the air. Lower your rod point of course, to lessen any resistance and prevent his falling athwart a taut line; which is what he may have done before to another angler.

But I am forgetting this is a blank day, a day of disaster. You hook the fish indeed and he gives a sidelong leap on the surface, a convulsive squirm, and your fly almost strikes you in the face. We all know the feeling: take it as read; and pass up and on to the still water above the run.

Whip away under the rushes of the opposite bank. There! two or three tidy fish have already run up out of the shallow, so that your hours of failure are pursuing you, or rather you are pursuing them. The next stretch is cold and windblown, a row of stakes is on the left, and shallow water at your feet. You are no good at left hand casting so it seems utterly hopeless to go on. That fish you have lost—the only bit of sport enjoyed all day—is on your mind, and it may be well worth while after a pipe-filling pause to approach him again, this time from above, with a long line and a wet fly. If he is not *in situ* but has retired with toothache another may have taken his place, and I quite agree that the laborious detour through the meadow and over two lots of barbed wire, in order to again get below him, seems hardly worth the trouble under the circumstances.

Fish down the run with a hackle fly for choice—a drowned female blue upright is as good a pattern as any—and hope to attract a non-feeding fish. It is a forlorn game I know on such a day; but if you cannot get one by orthodox means you must try for a fluke. If you have reason to believe that the run contains good trout put on a dopper. It may be more attractive in a place like this, especially in the broken water. Probably a small fish will rise at it almost at once and you will notice his whole yellow form turn over the cast although scarcely a check comes to the line.

Of course everything depends upon the season. If our supposititious blank day occurs in March or April you have very little chance after five o'clock. And yet this moment I can remember a last half hour in mid April when between 5.30 and 6 p.m. I arrived back at the pool where the rod had been put together earlier in the day.

It had been an utter blank rendered memorable by bad luck, bad fishing, bungling and a break. My creel was empty of everything; my temper, patience, and appetite at the last lap, and I speared the rod with a thud in the turf by the railway above the stone bridge overlooking what we called—in July—the peal pool. Under the point of the bush fringe opposite there was a rise, a second, and a third—rises clearly at floating flies. The fly being quite dry enough for the purpose, I knelt down and pitched it above the spot expecting a flap from a fingerling. Instead of that it was taken and proved to be a bright half pounder. The others continued; and although the train was already in my thoughts, I had ample time for casting.

Within a minute another good rise came, an awkward kick, and he was free. This caused a lull and I began to think of reeling up when two rings came abreast of each other, right under the prickly bush. One came again, a trifle lower, as though he had dropped back, and the next moment my fly was in the place; a turn came under water as though it were being followed, a strike, and it was taken down

in earnest. The fish never showed, he kept well under and seemed stronger—indeed he began to assume the imaginative proportions of a three-quarter pounder.

Round the railing he came, the line resting on barbed wire, until I could get over and lift the skirts of a mackintosh as well as disentangle the net. Then he kicked on a tight line, but it was no good, for as it proved he was only a nine ouncer hooked foul in the cheek.

Never in my experience has a foul-hooked trout managed to regain his pals without taking the hook to prove his story.

During the landing process the other fish rose and joined his fellow—only seven ounces—and that ended it. After such a bad day it seemed foolish to wait in the growing cold another hour and a half for the next train. The rod was put down on the platform in good time and, to show how childish a man can become, I was quite elated at this piece of luck. Others had scored a brace, or a blank and so had I but for this accommodating party of four taking a snack after hours—an utter blank just avoided, but so narrowly that the days record is properly included in this chapter.

It is difficult to give hints for days which threaten to be blanks. Change of fly effects something; change of tactics more. The best chance lies in a change of water, I mean to fish parts which ordinarily you pass by. More particularly does this apply to shallows. If the day is blustering think of some exposed shallow

pool above or below a cattle ford very often, where trout always see one and move away from the bank long before you get towards casting distance.

Manœuvre up into position during a strong wind flaw and take what cover is offered. If a shingly or grassy beach lie down on your side and wriggle a shade closer to the water. Then, with the wind to assist, begin to cover every square yard you can reach; throwing up and across and allowing the flies—for a dropper here is most important—to float right down stream every time on a lengthening line. These tactics have saved many a blank day, and, so long as the wind continues, some fair chance of sport may extend hour by hour although nothing breaks the surface. This form of approach is most advisable dirty, wet, and uncomfortable as it sounds—indeed it is far wetter and dirtier. Fish which are feeding intermittently under water in a shallow must be undisturbed. They can see through ordinary ripples especially anything tall, but however shy they are they will often take it when one is lying down.

As any fish caught must be beached it is rather interesting to let him drift downstream with an additional ten yards of line to play with and exhaust himself—or get off—among the stones in a few inches of water. He has to be gradually windlassed up, until he slides alongside one's elbow, and basketed without ever rising beyond a sitting posture. Trout of even ten ounces can be slithered up this way without

disturbing the shallow; whereas the getting up and back into position in order to use a net may make certain of the one fish but also of no other.

A fine series of blank days can generally be counted upon by those who fish in July and yet are debarred from stopping on until the evening rise. A really hot July day with a low water when brother anglers, who hanker after false gods, whisper treason about clear water worm, can promise as much in the way of a blank as a Barking creek could perform. But it is no use grumbling: if you are out for a day you must fish. Seek out a shady deepish run under some bushes and then from the shallow side try your most artistic casts on a longish line; pitching a dry fly, a small olive or pale watery dun, yard by yard upon the surface, letting it float for five or six feet under bushes which almost touch the water. It will be taken within forty casts, probably at a particular moment when you have looked away. You give a furious belated strike, as though you were trying to fix a meat hook into the jaws of a dolphin, and your point with the fly is left in the lip of a really good fish, the cast flying back into an inconspicuous gorse bush yards away in the thistles.

But for this permanent hitch up you would again have cast at the spot where the demon disappeared. We all do this, I don't know why and have often smiled when thinking of the method of reasoning it out. If a badly

bepricked trout is to so quickly take a hair of the dog that bit him one must imagine him saying "Well I did enjoy that lacerating tweak that has loosened my tongue: I really did, and I will dally on the top of the water just where it occurred in hopes of getting another taste or at least of being caught in the loins or the eye."

With a played out grayling such a process might be possible—no doubt it has been done as I have cast for and foul hooked a water rat—but with a trout, never.

Still better if on a well thrashed Association water make a point of walking up the right bank—geography books still persist in telling you it is the left bank—and cast with your left hand in the same manner getting the fly well under the long overhanging grasses. On scores of occasions you may find such a bank unoccupied—even in a May fly week—and can pitch your evening camp there undisturbed. If you have practised for a short time every day left hand casting comes simple enough in two seasons; while in three or more it is no trouble whatever excepting against a wind, when the extra twitch of the right hand is needed to cut the fly on to the water.

As a blank day cure in Summer I know of no plan better than this one especially if the casts be made parallel to the water, of course from a kneeling position, thus assisting the fly to visit those small bays and inlets which are partially arched over with the tufts that have

escaped the hay cutting machine. From personal experience as regards flies used I find that red ant, black spider, and even a small governor have all been fortunate enough to hook and to hold trout of from 1¼ to 1¾ pounds in such places in the forenoon of a brilliant and unpromising July day.

Two fine fish of about this weight I also once hooked and lost upon a gold-ribbed hare's ear within five minutes of each other; the second after an exhilarating reel screech, and a telephonic line throbbing message from a weed bed to say goodbye. These fish were attracted from a comfortable *ventre a terre* position with a very short line, one indeed almost partaking of the dap style.

All this has of course occurred to every experienced angler; who possibly says little about it. Indeed the experienced angler on the bank differs sometimes from the one that figures in the story books—not very much perhaps, take him all round, but in small particulars. An awkward right hand bank with overhanging tangle where the river is broad or hardly fishable from the other side is the place where many a specimen trout has been picked out. If the man who has left it takes a short cut across the meadow and thus avoids conversation, it may be that he has a slimy secret in his creel, present or prospective, which he wishes no eyes or anticipation to feast upon.

That waiting with a cinnamon sedge between thumb and finger in the dusk of an August

evening after a blank day, with a kink in the small of your back from continuous kneeling, becomes one's last resource time after time and season after season. There is an element of fortune in it, as you cannot do much more than watch the twenty yards of bank ahead; but blank after blank can be broken if a left handed awkward cast is the only one likely to attract a cautious trout or an extra large grayling.

So often too when they come are they good fish that if one is hooked and netted early in the limited time they allot for their angler-baiting process, there may be a chance of a procession of three all finding themselves on the same scales. With really gilt edged luck this is the time for a solid two pounder so that hope can be continued right up to the end.

The blank is breakable even on the walk home down stream. Keep a look out especially when a turn in the path brings the western sky, or the moon, over the water close to the rushes. In such a case do not stickle for the upstream cast, but float your sedge down over him and do not strike too soon. He will do the business for you if he means anything at all. I remember hooking and landing a fine trout after a bad day and within a few minutes seeing another not ten yards lower down. The second one took the fly, gave me play right to within a cast of our opening stile, was plunging and splashing in the forget-me-nots, and got off literally on the net—the

actual net having doubled itself across the rim in the shape of a tennis bat. He might have been thrown out. He was a splendid two pounder: the other weighed 1 lb. 14 oz. at the Post Office counter.

Still, this skirmish in the dusk raised the thermometer of one's feelings ten degrees and elicited an opinion from the Postmaster which surprised me more than I could say. "That is the best trout I have ever weighed on these scales." While recollecting this I had better add a codicil to say that the lost two pounder was possibly an ounce or two less, though I honestly do not think so. I can see the hiatus in the muddy bank now in my mind's eye and gauge his weight on the net.

FLOOD LANDS AND WATER SUPPLY.

A River's Birthright.

Famous rivers lessening into shallow brooks.
SWIFT.

WHETHER or not the Egyptians, before the time of Herodotus, possessed a great deal more knowledge concerning the management of a river, in times of drought and of flood, than is enjoyed by the average conservator of the present day, it is certain that no record of complaint has come down to us regarding the mismanagement of the Nile; while a great many accounts and illustrations are extant of the engineering feats planned and carried out hundreds, if not thousands, of years before Christ.

That the Egyptians had learnt the importance of not interfering with the flood lands of the Nile, but had left to nature the formation of those 'Khors' mentioned so frequently in the accounts of Kitchener's Khartoum expedition, is beyond all question; while it appears that this same knowledge has been withheld from those who during the past fifty years have been responsible for the management or conservation of the Thames.

It had better be stated in the first instance exactly what is meant by 'flood lands.' They

are the meadows, swamps, inlets, bogs, soft places, or lagoons, which in every natural river lie on either side of its banks where the country is fairly level. Needless to say, where a river passes through a rocky defile there can be no flood lands, and any rush of water merely deepens and slightly widens the stream.

During its summer—or perhaps it would be more correct to say—during its drought level, when the water recedes below its average banks, the flood lands become almost dry, and in that aspect rather offer themselves for cultivation, or permanent occupation.

Little objection, from the river's point of view, can be taken to their being used as osier or water cress beds, or as preserves for snipe. But they rightly and naturally belong to the river, just as much as a reserve fund belongs to a Bank; and if once this fact is lost sight of, and they are used for other purposes, nature is certain to be revenged in her usual slow and sure method.

The very fact of these damp places being left undrained and uncultivated renders their soil spongy, mossy, and fibrous; in which state it both absorbs and retains moisture during the weeks or months of a prolonged drought, and also promotes the growth of vegetation which may in its turn retain, utilise, or even induce an increased rainfall.

But for the possession of its flood lands, therefore, a river could almost run itself dry, or at least become resolved into a mere

succession of pools. During prolonged wet weather, the river again looks to its flood lands for assistance. It becomes bank high; and then the increasing flood water, instead of being all hurried down stream to do tearing damage to its own banks, and to those who dwell near them or between them, has room to spread far and wide over the meadows, swamps, and reservoirs, which nature or man have either provided or prepared.

It is, in two words, held up; and can take its own time for gradual evaporation, absorption or dispersal. Although the whole country at one time of writing may be deploring a water famine, and grumbling at the insufficient storage capacity of the various Water Companies' reservoirs, one has only to look a few years back to find letters in the press asking for more adequate provision against the state of flood, consequent upon a continuous wet winter. Here then are the two extremes of flood and drought both occurring within one quinquennial period, and both likely to recur in future years, so long as the flood lands, properly belonging to the rivers are not strictly conserved, or even restored to their original littoral ownership.

When engineers plan the building of a bridge in a tropical country, they set to work intelligently to learn up the history of the river, which they propose to span, for a period of ten years or more; together with the average rainfall in that river's upper districts. Even after this precaution, they occasionally find that

the ten years' record is not enough, and that an abnormal flood, like that which swept away the bridge at Brisbane, upsets all their calculations.

Nothing so strikes the attention of a visitor to hilly and wooded tropical districts, during the dry season, than the vast disproportion between a tiny stream trickling through a large bed of sand, and the enormous span of a new iron bridge which carries the road or the railway across the nullah. Yet in England—especially in the whole length of the Thames valley—one is almost forced to the conclusion that intelligence has been sadly wanting—or has been sacrificed to greed—as evidenced by the gradual reclamation of the flood lands.

Had the river Thames been conserved, in the literal sense of the word, there would neither have been floods in one year, nor a severe drought in another. Anyone who walks along the banks of a river can see fairly accurately what difference a rise of one foot, or two feet, will make as regards the retention of the stream in its normal bed. When the rise amounts to four and five feet, owing to heavy rain in the upper or hilly districts, it is evident that the water requires an outlet, through natural or artificial 'Khors' or channels, into some adjacent low lying land, where it can remain for days or weeks until the season changes and the stream subsides.

Where adequate flood lands are provided, as they are by nature, it is often possible to

prevent a small river from rising as much as four feet lower down the stream by thus retaining the overflow.

During a long series of years, prior to the present generation, our English rivers had been accustomed to occupy certain low lying land after every burst of wet weather. They filled the dykes in February in the old proverbial manner, and the lower reaches were accordingly saved from the full force of the flood. The Thames was able, to a limited extent, to look after itself as soon as the lock system was completed, and needed but a little intelligent assistance in order to behave well during the wettest years. This help has never been given: and instead of a single acre of flood land being provided for the use of the river, thousands of acres have been gradually abstracted from it.

Of late indeed not a year passes during which some reclamation of flood land does not take place. The river is thus 'cabined, cribbed, confined,' until its waters have no lateral outlet, but are forced to pour down the main stream and cause dangerous and damaging inundations in the lower reaches above Richmond. Thus floods at Windsor may be caused by the walling off of flood lands above Oxford or Reading: and floods at Kingston from the reclamation of low lying meadows at Windsor.

A river without flood lands is simply akin to a railway without sidings; and disorganisation is a natural consequence.

As the principle alone is being discussed, no

object can be gained by the citation of glaring examples. These are very evident and must occur to a man who even takes a long cycle ride along the banks of a river. In one place, it is an old creek leading to a large pond which has been piled off by a private landowner, and the pond in the rear filled up and done away with. In another, it is the low lying swampy bank that has been artificially raised perhaps four feet by a house proprietor in order to prevent his garden from being annually submerged. (You can hardly tell him now that the garden ought never to have been there). In a third it is a long asphalte wall, ten feet high, erected by a speculative builder, in order to turn what was a river side snipe swamp into an eligible building site.

Thus acre by acre, and year by year, the abstraction goes on under everyone's eyes; just as the abstraction of common land used to, until a river has no reserves at all, and the soil on either side of it is drained and dry from decade to decade. Why, even the flood arches of bridges may be seen let to boat builders, or coal merchants, in many places; who no doubt complain bitterly, and think of compensation, should a drop of flood water ever dare to trickle through their premises. The irony of it strikes nobody.

Leave the Thames, and turn to any and every other river, stream, brook, or ditch in the country. Even look at them from the train window along a railway route familiar to you

from boyhood, and carry your memory back as far as you can. Has any one of them increased in volume during the past fifteen or twenty years? Has anyone suffered less than a twenty per cent. shrinkage?

On either side of the railway line, one can note the changed and changing features of country. The swamp of a dozen years ago, where clumps of marsh marigold stood out like brass headed nails from the dull dark earth visible half a mile away, has had a deep herring bone drain cut through it, which conducts the old water storage, gallon by gallon along the edge of the lower field, into a ditch; and ultimately into a brook. These same drains will now serve to conduct the very next shower of rain down the same well worn channel, and all within half an hour; whereas nature had been accustomed to something more like the pace of a glacier.

It would seem as though some harm to agriculture must result later on if this drainage is continued in so wholesale and systematic a manner.

We can only have cattle upon a thousand hills, provided we have streams in a hundred valleys.

These streams too, if they are never to fail, must look to waters held in solution in meadows and swamps—waters which are given up to the streams so slowly and grudgingly, that the fierce months of a dry summer have completed their season before the last drop has percolated

from the swamp to the ditch, or has been licked up in evaporation.

For a long period the gradual drainage of this country must have added millions to the natural wealth. Roman England sounds like a series of high pitched camps and military roads dominating a country of wooded morasses. From even earlier traces than this London appears as a pile village not unlike those of Malaya or New Guinea. No doubt the rivers needed curbing and taming all through the bad old days, even the bad old coaching days, but we do not want to improve them altogether off the face of the country. Many small streams have suffered this fate, their names serving as grave stones in certain districts. The old anglers who caught trout in the West-bourne, or the Tye-bourne (Tyburn) would lose their bearings to-day if set down on the spot of their old pastime; just as we shall a generation hence when revisiting places where we netted minnows, or caught small trout on a worm, as boys.

Overwhelming evidence as to the conversion of swamp or flood land into grass or building sites can be gathered from the most cursory study of bird life in England during the last hundred years. The bittern has been treated like the Tasmanian until he is nearly or quite extinct in most places outside the Fen country. Bewick, and the early editions of Yarrell, tell a different tale from Seebohm as to the range and number of the *grallatores* or wading birds. No one can look through the inimitable wood-

cuts of Bewick without being struck by the bird life in the swamps. Snipe, coots, and all kinds of duck appear to have been numerous on the flood lands of every river in the kingdom.

The Angler's Outlook.

I remember sitting at a Geographical Society's dinner alongside a stranger when good fortune introduced the topic of fly fishing between us. I had been saying what a charming thing it would be to have the lease or the ownership of a long stretch of small brook, and to widen, deepen, and dam it, until it became a trout stream—to form your own bends and small weirs, to plant its sides just as you thought would be suited to the fish, and perhaps even to have a hatchery adjoining.

After listening for some time he quietly remarked that he had just lately done all this 'to a small stream called the Lathkill in Derbyshire.' It all sounded to me as delightful as a fairy tale, read to the children just before bedtime, which you cannot help listening to from the writing table. I told him that in Devonshire we called 'a nice fish' one of eight ounces, and 'a good fish' one of twelve or over. 'Well, if you will come and fish my water one Saturday and Monday, I have no doubt you will do much better than that. We should use those terms for trout just double the size. My daughter has caught one of nearly two pounds.'

A few short years afterwards I saw the death

of his wife in the paper; and later on his own. But I have often fancied and fished his fairy stream from the library armchair, reconstructing his small lodge and all the pools and dams he formed. It must have been intense pleasure to him after a busy life. I wonder who has it now.

Since the early part of this chapter was written in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (who have kindly given me permission to reproduce it) in 1899, a great deal has been done by certain angling associations and hotels to prevent this wasting of the water supply and its inevitable consequence. While they look after an actual river however, they can do little with the adjoining lands. They are powerless to prevent the swamps, which hold, like a sponge, thousands of tons of water, from being drained. While they are conserving the cash in hand, someone else is tampering with the bank balance. None of us want to see fly fishing die out, like hawking, as an English sport. But it is extremely difficult to know how it can hold its own for another thirty years with all the troubles that threaten it. While the quantity of the water is decreasing, its quality is being tried by chemical works or drainage, and by tar refuse from the newly treated roads —two factors which must kill out game fish from many a stream otherwise well suited to their requirements.

WHERE TO FISH.

EARLY SPRING—THE AXE VALLEY—SHUTE ESTATE WATER—DOVEDALE—SMALL HOLDINGS—SPORT AND SIMPLE LIFE.

'Tis a month before the month of May
And Spring comes slowly up this way.

How soft the music of those village bells
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet . . .
. . . whenever I have heard
A kindred melody the scene recurs,
And with it all its pleasures.

COWPER.

I WAS always rather taken with the account of a City man who never made a plan of where he was going for his holiday, until he had packed his portmanteau and was ready to hail a cab. He would then suddenly settle which terminus to drive to; and be guided by his fancy or caprice, either on seeing a train ready to start, or after looking down a time table, in the matter of taking a ticket for a station over a hundred miles away.

His pleasure also was to make just the same haphazard choice of an inn, leaving his luggage at the station, and strolling about until he saw what he thought would suit him. He might stop a night, or spend a fortnight; and usually

managed to enjoy his holiday as much as others who had laid their plans for months before, and knew to an hour where they would be every day.

Although I have never actually done this, I must own the plan sounds attractive. We all see rivers from train windows the very names of which we do not know, yet which wind among quiet old world villages miles away from a station. I have often longed to take my bag and fishing rod, book to the station nearest to such a river, and put up at the village inn for the night, relying upon my being able to hear of some meadows where I might throw a line.

My first introduction to the Axe was brought about in a very similar manner years ago. It was the first week in April after an exceptionally early Easter, when having on a previous journey to Exeter seen the Shute Arms Hotel from the carriage window, I made up my mind to send a wire, and book to Seaton Junction, arriving there early in the afternoon in time to go on to Colyton or Seaton, in case I could not be taken in. As it happened, all turned out most pleasantly. A fishing ticket for the Shute Estate preserved water was going to be available the following day when a visitor was leaving, and that same visitor, a young schoolmaster, who came in at teatime with four brace of small trout, took me for a walk before dinner and proved a most entertaining companion as we sat up and smoked together afterwards.

So much was his company appreciated that I

decided to forego the next morning's fishing, and went for a walk with him instead, through woods and lanes round Axminster, Chardstock, and Colyton. It was my first country holiday that year. The masses of primroses, as well as the sight of the first swallow, made me in love with the district from that day forward.

Acting upon his advice I fished the Coly more than the Axe during the four days that the ticket covered, getting a few trout each day of over the limit (nine inches) headed by a brace of ten ouncers. The Axe I found very difficult for the want of knowing which part to fish. Roaming about is often a mistake; and so it proved on this occasion. There is always an inclination on new water to try the whole length during a first visit, which results naturally in taking plenty of exercise with but little to show for it at the end of the day.

For a week in early spring the Shute Estate maintains a good reputation, provided one is lucky enough to avoid a gusty or cold snap. I know few places where the effect of a north wind is more biting and disastrous than in the open Axe valley between Colyton and Colyford. That is perhaps why I always look back to the first visit, when the weather could hardly have been kinder, and when the whole face of the country, and of the river, smiled a welcome. It is only fair to remember too that, on one of the days I was fishing, a local angler brought home seven brace from the Coly of a distinctly better average than my best day's basket.

There is another good piece of fishing above Axminster, a rod on which can, I believe, be obtained for three guineas a season, where excellent trout are obtained on June evenings. On all the lower reaches of the Axe sea trout or peal are taken after July, and although I have never caught any of much over a pound, other anglers have had a far better experience. Salmon of good size run up the Axe freely; but that is another matter altogether.

From those who have been fortunate enough to obtain a day or two on the Shute stream, I have heard good accounts. It is really a tiny brook, with a few open pools and a dam, which winds down through hilly meadows from the high ground under which the Honiton tunnel has its boring. Many a Sunday evening in summer have I walked along it to watch the trout rising in the small pools from behind a screen of willows. They must give pretty sport with an eight foot rod, as they apparently run to a better size than the average on the Estate water.

Although glorious Devon begins between Chard Road and Axminster, I always feel that the centre of the Honiton tunnel is the real gateway. The train, even with its most powerful engine—it used to be two—pants and groans up the incline past almost deserted orchards, so old that most of the trees stand on crutches; past swampy copses and meadows starred with primroses, marsh-marigolds, and daffodils; past a cottage close to the line, guarded by giant sows, where

the children always wave me a welcome from a broken stone wall; past sleeper-propped huts, where the gang of workmen, whose task at the tunnel seems never ending, keep their tools and frying pans; up further again, alongside a quarry which yields water from its rock, as though Moses with his rod had a week-end retreat among its gullies; until the hoarse croak, which is all the engine whistle can manage from its wheezy throttle, is drowned in the entrance to the steep and gloomy tunnel.

Then comes the steady acceleration, a vision of popping lights, a shiny roof— still as always dripping upon its patient repairers—and we rush down the gradient into sunshine again, knowing we have passed from the Axe to the Otter valley.

This year (1912) there are to be for the first time Sunday trains on the Sidmouth and the Budleigh branch lines. The old walk alongside the river, until Ottery St. Mary church stands out against the yew trees and the setting sun, will probably be discontinued. I, for one, shall always regret it. For many years that walk in mid March from Sidmouth Junction has been an event looked forward to as the opening of my fishing season. By a certain gateway, leading into a tangled copse, a friend so often met me that I used to wait at the place much as younger men do for their sweethearts on the same Sunday evenings.

This friend was a white owl which beat along the hedgerows parallel to my walk, crossing and

recrossing, always appearing and disappearing at the same places. Of late years it has failed me: though I have waited by the gate in the gathering dusk until the cold evening air obliged me to walk on, after deepening my initials on the top bar, cut some seven years ago when I first saw it. Nailed to a barn door perhaps by some well meaning gamekeeper, has too probably been its fate.

Speaking of picturesque villages far from the beaten track reminds me of Gittisham. As one strikes up from Tipton St. John to the high ridge above Ottery, and passing through Wigaton, the road through Gittisham is not the nearest way. Like the Autocrat's first walk with the Schoolmistress, that is why we take it. There is plenty of time to pick up the Sunday train, which used to stop at Honiton at 2 p.m., and get back to work after the two days' fishing.

There is no walk I can remember which brings more vividly before you the absolute desertion of the country on Sunday morning. For miles and miles you will not see a solitary human being. What becomes of the few labourers who work during the week, I cannot think. While we all talk in theory of 'back to the land,' the trend of this entire England seems to be to get 'back to London.' Many of us cannot help ourselves. I among others can never sufficiently appreciate the good fortune that has enabled me for so many years to enjoy these week-end journeys.

Perhaps it is the natural instinct of a City

worker. Perhaps it is a morbid or unnatural restlessness: but the mere fact of distance in an express train adds to the luxury of the outing.

Dovedale.

A week end trip to a very different line of country is that to Dovedale in Derbyshire. The train has for many years past left Euston at 11 a.m., never stopping until Nuneaton, and setting you down at Thorpe Cloud a little before three o'clock.

I have stayed at both the 'Isaak Walton' and the 'Peveril of the Peak' hotels, each of which gives access to fishing in the Dale. The Isaak Walton has a portion of the Manifold—as well as the Dove—a stony stream below the hotel, containing good grayling in the autumn. The Peveril water is above the stepping stones on the right bank, looking up, and leads you through the narrow Dale, where the sport can be better described as pretty than actually good.

For a trip to Dovedale, May and October are by far the best months for the angler, owing to the comparative absence of trippers. Those who can take a week in the latter half of a fine October, and who lay themselves out to enjoy the crimson, brown, and gold masses of foliage, which rise for hundreds of feet above you on either side, as well as the mountain air, can hardly be disappointed with the fishing. They can climb Thorpe Cloud on Sunday morning, then taking their luncheon with them, can spend the day wandering up the Dale, returning at

tea time to plan an evening stroll to Ilam church.

At either hotel the visitor is hard to please who does not feel at home after the first half hour, and is fairly sure to secure some pleasant sport on the Saturday and Monday. To obtain the advantage of the week-end ticket, it may still be necessary to book to Ashbourne instead of Thorpe Cloud.

Grayling, in the Dove and Manifold, do not attain the size of those in the Hampshire rivers; indeed a fish of a pound and a half is perhaps as uncommon as a three pounder at Stockbridge or Bishopstoke. But they are bright and beautiful, game and cunning, for all that: yielding the most enjoyable blank days to many a skilful angler. I mean of course upon occasions.

Fishing on Small Holdings.

There are small farms within five miles of Torrington, Honiton, and Thorverton where the most enjoyable fishing can be obtained by those who lay themselves out to get it, and who do not mind the food and accommodation of the smaller inns or cottages. Many a City man will reply eagerly that he is always prepared to rough it for the sake of good sport. He is 'quite game to live on chops and steaks.' If his idea of chops and steaks is derived from Simpson's or Baker's, it would be amusing to watch him tackle the samples which can be produced in the west country.

Where they get the shapes of meat which they sometimes produce, I cannot divine. The very bones of the chops seem different to those belonging to ordinary sheep or goats—double as long—while the meat, which is fastened to them by thews of twisted gimp, causes the teeth of a mincing machine to ache in anticipation.

I remember once asking my landlady if she could manage to give me a fowl for Sunday midday dinner; and after a long morning spent in looking for white violets, I looked forward to the comely form of a roast chicken, with perhaps bread sauce and chipped potatoes. The cooking and the serving had been deputed to her small maid. At length the dinner hour arrived, and when the soup plate was removed from the dish a curious sight and steamy odour alarmed the senses.

In the dish was a substance which I took at first for an unfortunate boiled suet pudding, or an overlooked bran mash. It was without form or void, and emitted a suppressed hissing sound; in fact it moved uneasily in the dish like cooling lava, as though it had been well below the face of the waters during a volcanic period. I touched it with a fork, and after slight pressure the leg bone of a fowl or rabbit came through as clean as a museum skeleton. A further probing proved that all the bones were there. They were curiously mixed however, wings and legs being indistinguishable. It was not a roast fowl at all. No, it must have been boiled. It certainly looked as though the boiling had

been over-extended by a week in a hot water cistern, and it had then come down the waste pipe. The flesh was grey and fibrous, having a faint taste of saucepan lining with soot flavouring; but it is only fair to add that, although I eat much of it, I never felt better in my life than during that afternoon or evening. It was the most unconventional treatment of a veteran rooster that I ever saw attempted even by a Tamil kitchen-cooly, which is saying a good deal.

Many of the small farms in question own nothing more than a couple of good pools connected by a gravelly run of fifty yards. These farms lie perhaps two miles from a station from which the last train leaves at nine o'clock. This means that they are good enough in Spring when the best fishing is between ten a.m. and four p.m., but are useless in Summer for the evening rise to anyone who had to reel up and leave the bank just at the only time (8 o'clock) when there is the chance of good sport.

Yet if one cares to map out a plan of campaign upon so modest a field, and can manage to get put up at some adjacent cottage, so as to be able to stay until at least nine-thirty, the sum total of a week's sport in a well behaved June does not compare amiss against similar evenings spent upon a club water.

The two pools and the run are often quite enough for one, if you are that one; or if you

can feel sure that a good fish which you have pricked or lost on Monday; and mean to revisit on Wednesday, has not succumbed to another man's fly in the meantime.

One great difficulty is to keep your little preserve secret; that is if you happen to know other rods and are in the helpless position of having to run the fire of cross questioning that the exhibition of any decent brace of trout always invites. One can parry this ordeal with strangers without giving offence or illtreating truth; but the desperate inquisitiveness of neighbours is a more difficult matter to evade. They want to know when, where and how you managed to get leave; where you put up; whether they may share a trap to the same or an adjacent place. They generally succeed in worming the small discovery from you, and chart it accurately upon their survey—for annexation. You do not like to own to the modest finesse employed in attaining your object, to the ground baiting used in the form of fowls bought from the farmer's wife—for the proprietor as often as not declines a money payment—or rabbits left at the house during the preceding autumn or winter.

A friend, who I know will read these lines, wrote me accounts at intervals during a whole season of sport he was enjoying in a place such as I allude to. The water consisted of a dam, a mill leet, a small run, and a bathing pool on a river where half pounders were always respected. Week after week he managed to

secure two and three brace on lucky evenings ranging as high as thirteen ounces, with a special *cuvee* of pounders from the pool.

As we were a hundred and fifty miles apart, and both doing well as doctor's bulletins say, the exchange of experiences incurred no risk of either of us trespassing on the other's preserves. This kind of fishing is of course incompatible with the meals of civilisation. One must not only rough it, but be content with simple life and an outdoor existence. But it can be attained every year in nearly every county by those who are keen enough to seek out, and put up with, its conditions. It can be managed by City men on holiday, alone, almost better than by country residents who do not care for the discomfort of sleeping away from their homes, or who might feel a little ashamed of their surroundings.

For ten years now I have always been fortunate enough to take a holiday of three weeks in Devonshire or Hants embracing usually the last week of April and the first fortnight of May; waiting in fact for the quiet time which sees the gloriously lengthening days between Easter and Whitsuntide—which sees the arrival and hears the song of the warblers, the black-cap, the willow wrens and the chiffchaff, as they choose their nesting places—which sees the sky changing from ominous black to smiling showers after the east wind has had its innings and the flooded meadows have recovered from the furious rain storms that followed its departure—which

brings the cuckoo's welcome call to the angler as he puts up his rod, and the green woodpecker's joyous laugh as he loses his first fish.

When all the land is musical, 'the woods like great cathedrals pillared with oaks, and roofed with the sky, from which the birds sing like hidden nuns in the green twilight of the leafy cloisters.'

During this time there is seldom much gained by being too early. One can go down to the bridge in slippers for an hour before breakfast, without the rod, and make plans for the day according to the wind and one's own inclination, deferring the real start until ten or ten thirty.

I used at one time to be bursting with impatience; to hurry to the best runs and meadows with the idea of getting ahead of other fishermen, the result being that I found my pleasure rather clouded by haste, and my sport by bad casting or careless fishing. Fortunately I have never aspired to being a first rate fly fisherman, have no reputation to keep up, and can be as philosophic as anyone over an empty creel, without abating a jot of keenness or feeling a tinge of ennui.

There is no denying that angling is selfish in all these particulars. To feel that you can deposit your belongings under the hedge near one pool while you move up to fish the other; and can return to the first exactly when you like with no fear of finding it occupied, constitutes a satisfaction that all will understand. The week-end visit from Friday to Tuesday

evening is often the exact length of time you care to devote to it. Far nicer to return a day before you want to after good sport than to outstay your own pleasure. As the old German proverb says 'the man who wants to get the last drop in the tankard is very likely to get the lid on his nose.' In that particular a pleasant four days is like a good profit. You must leave the last bit for someone else, or for another time.

WADING.

A Sanctuary for Trout—The Charm of Free Water—A Surprise Basket—Pleasant Tramps Back.

'Tis sweet to hear the watch dog's honest bark
Bay deep mouthed welcome as we draw near home;
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come.

BYRON.

ON far more than half the water that I have ever had the fortune to fish, wading has been prohibited; and, much as the restriction is often grumbled at or actively resented by holiday visitors with day tickets, there is no denying that from a proprietor's point of view, it is the best, and perhaps the only plan of preventing the stock of good fish from being exterminated.

It forms in fact, like the prohibition of worm or minnow, a kind of preservation, very like that of dry fly fishing.

We can all of us recall winding streams where every half mile or so the trees meet overhead for a short interval, rendering casting impossible; or again where the opposite side is steep and cliff like with trailing ivy or dripping ferns,

under whose roots the deep water is removed from us by a full twenty yards of gravelly shallow. In each case the poaching instinct asserts itself; the thought occurs of breaking rules or promises, and of stepping into the stream, to reach the coveted spot where the trout continue to rise, on days which threaten ominously to prove blanks. Where such places occupy less than ten per cent. of the available water the true angler will own at once that he is not unfairly handicapped, and he must regard them either as nurseries or sanctuaries. But for their existence and maintenance, all chance of hooking a trout well over the average would be so remote that his sport and pleasure would lose half their excitement.

Thirty years ago when anglers were few, and generally local, even a stretch of free water was able to maintain its reputation of furnishing specimen trout every month, and of retaining a decent head of fish year after year; but now, when we have nothing less than a territorial army all trained by experts, all well equipped with the most modern split cane weapons, the most deadly ammunition of duns and alders, as well as with petrol driven lines of communication and commissariat, nothing but an angling Hague tribunal can prevent the last six ounce trout from being literally hunted down, surrounded, and given no quarter.

Even the boy scouts of this army now exist in the form of youths well versed in the habits of fish and birds, assisted as they are by

school-board text books, and Nature-study lectures.

They can chase a spawning trout up a narrow brook in November, and stop its retreat by a barricade; doing thereby as much damage as an enemy that poisons the wells. Any regret I have ever felt at reading the words 'no wading allowed' upon my ticket has long since faded away, or has been replaced by a feeling of thankfulness that for another generation perhaps fly fishing may exist for the lower ten thousand, as well as for the upper five hundred.

There are two main objects in wading. The first is to enable you to fish water quite out of reach otherwise: the second to cover a pool or shallow from a downstream position.

Wading is in fact strategic or tactical. On broad shallow rivers interspersed with boulders like parts of the Coquet, the Teme, or the Manifold, wading is necessary to get at the water. On smaller streams, easy enough to cast across from bank to bank with a nine foot rod, wading is often the only means of coming into touch with the sharp sighted fish that are feeding above a stickle and which cannot possibly be attacked on either flank. This is the form of wading that requires the education of at least two seasons to be brought to workmanlike efficiency. Practised on still summer evenings on free water, where as we all know a blank of anything over six ounces is the usual reward of four hours enjoyment, it has a calm fascination for the enthusiast.

To set off up the river at seven o'clock in June or July with a tried and trusted friend, and to meet the returning holiday angler hurrying back to the apartment supper, and thus leaving the field in peace, constitutes a pleasure composed of little or no alloy.

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It is a left bank water with a public footpath extending for two miles, before you come to the small bridge half hidden by the trees, and the notice board with the variegated fate awaiting trespassers engraven upon it. All this lovely stretch of river is slightly affected by the tide, the stickles being drowned during the hours of high water; and, during spring tides being quite unfishable excepting for peal. As the course of the river is roughly north and south, the bank angler has all the glow of the western sky behind him, thus giving a warning silhouette to the few and wary trout who venture forth after their prey like the lions in the psalms. This is where wading does something to equalise the chance of a heavy fish finding itself upon a cool plate in the larder when man goeth forth to his work and to his labour on the following morning.

At its summer level, the river is fordable in many places for knee high rubber boots; and at exactly eight o'clock the passage is attempted, with much probing with the landing net handle, and much balancing on slimy stones, before a stand is taken up on the narrow beach or fringe of rushes, with its background of red cliff or

of tangled foliage. What a different scene is now presented. One feels secure in the protective shadow of the stalls, while the rises take place behind the footlights.

There is no need to roam about much once you have chosen a favourable pitch, as fifty or a hundred yards is quite enough to allot to oneself; care being taken to study the position of stakes and obstacles, which, clear enough now, will fade into dangerous unobtrusiveness after nine-thirty, or just when the coveted pounder indulges in his well chosen sucks of floating flies.

And, speaking of stakes and obstacles, it is needless to add there must be no dropper. Long before that time however the rise begins, at first the sprats and then the better fish. Some are rising in the broken or swift water, which can be easily covered by remaining on the bank, and are more readily attracted by casting with the left hand from a kneeling position; but afterwards the shallows must be approached.

The least ripple, or up stream wave, caused by stepping into the water clumsily, will spoil everything, and stop each reachable ring as suddenly as though you had thrown a stone in.

Edge quietly forward step by step without casting, and make your way up the current, until you stand a few yards below the unbroken glide of the shallow pool. Again, there is no hurry. Wait and watch as quietly as an old heron, keeping your best eye close under the

rushes of the bank on your left. If a promising rise takes place give time to see whether he is a feeder in position, or merely a roamer moving up stream. After he has risen twice, or three times, the critical moment has arrived, and the *first cast* must drop your fly a foot or so above him.

All the walk, all the trouble and planning, is rewarded by the tension of those few seconds. A ring appears, a sound like a smothered kiss, a pause, a check, a struggle. If all succeeds and he is played and netted, with cast almost round one's boots, it must appear to an onlooker—an imaginary one of course, for no one in his senses could tolerate a soul by his side at such a time—that trout fishing is not only simple, but is a certainty for the rod.

There are seven phases of pleasure, each in its way separate, yet, when complete, all compressed within a very few minutes. There is the pleasure of the rise, followed by that of moving into position and adjusting the length of line so that the cast may cover it without falling short or overlapping. Then comes the cast itself, and the true rise made at the false fly. Next, the crowning pleasure of the strike and the finding that the line is tight between you—the more sober pleasure of playing and netting—the quick and varying estimates of his size as you feel in the net, and the fond look at the divine form before he is dropped into the creel. The final pleasure is more one of pride, as the catch is shown on the dish at

home, after having been washed at the pantry sink, with tumblers and teacups pushed aside, and each glistening fish arranged head and tail on the grass you have hurried out and snatched beyond the back garden door.

But to return to the pool, where you have been standing. This has now been too disturbed by the waves of the recent struggle to offer much hope. Across to your right is a narrow side channel, very small and overhung but deep and swift. Just at the head of this, where the water laps over a stranded stake with an intermittent gurgle and is guarded by a hideous bramble, a good fish may be expected. A ridge of rush covered gravel affords some little cover; but if you have no knee pad you are badly handicapped.

Although the light is wrong, and you have scarcely two yards of line through the top ring it is worth watching; as a brace of fish on the free water in one evening means a bag well above the average in these degenerate days. You can see the eddy swirl round, where after a short and uncomfortable interval of attention there is a rise. It is so close that the movement of the rod may give the danger signal.

Possibly when a trout is poised so near to the surface his eyes are focussed for short vision only; and so it seems, for he has taken your cast and has bolted under some weeds, leaving the line round an obstacle almost before he felt the check. He is throbbing with fright, and you are with excitement. The line is freed

by good fortune, and the rod forms a neat curve with only the cast beyond the rings. There is nothing for it but to lie down, pull up your sleeve, and grope down the gut until your fingers are feeling among the weedy tendrils. You have got him tight by the gills. You manage to get out the scissors and cut the point with your left hand. Nothing of great size, but a plucky eight ouncer taken in his own lair by fair play.

Further up again the current is deeper, the volume of stream being under the left bank. A fish can be made out, rising repeatedly in the broken water, while a governor is being quickly tied on. Twice it seems to have moved him, and twenty, thirty casts are made at the place. Suddenly it is taken, he gives a tug right on the surface—a frantic struggle, and back it all comes with the fly still on, and in perfect order. Whether you were too rough, too soon, or too late, matters little; but the disturbing fact remains that he is in the river, one of the might-have-been pounders that jars upon your memory for hours after.

And so the evening passes, or rather glides into dusk without one's noticing the process.

With eyes gradually accustoming themselves to the fading light, one can see the rises up to ten o'clock or later, and can cast a fly with fair accuracy at the spot. After they have ceased, there is the final down-stream-and-across casting with its pulsating pauses, occasionally broken by a tug, either from a large trout or an early

peal. And finally the welcome 'coo-ey' from above or below, with the query as to whether you have knocked off.

Yes, there were giants in those days—as also in these, for the river has improved of late—and occasionally one of them was brought home, usually in my friend's creel, and weighed on the kitchen scales, after we had had the pleasurable topic of his estimate in ounces during the two mile tramp back along the marshes.

These giants too were not the nebulous fabled monsters described in hostelries, always in unbroken pounds, two pounders, or three pounders, occasionally topped by a hiccuping four pounder, caught—always 'on a dry fly'—by the gentleman in gaiters at the end of the bar, whose legs were as much in want of support as his tales, and whose fondness for running water would never have been guessed by the amount of whisky with which he diluted it.

This too, out of a river, remember, where a sixteen ounce trout is an object of beauty and envy. No; these giants of ours took the form of brown trout of one pound one, one pound five, one pound nine, one pound twelve—his tracing still preserved and coloured from memory.

All this night work reminds you of boyhood, of Fenimore Cooper's red Indians, where men of few words talk for five closely printed pages upon the necessity for preserving breathless silence at the cost of your life.

* * * * * * * *

And now it is a week and a year later. 'I like to be particular in dates'—the eleventh of July. It was not only a summer's day, but one of really tropical splendour, like that sixth of June which Doña Julia had cause for remembering so well.

We had agreed that it was useless to attempt day fishing, even when a ticket for the preserved water figured temptingly on the mantel piece. Although the river was low, it had been thoroughly freshened up by a week of continuous wet weather, and had not as yet run down to its summer level.

We had heard peal jump on the two previous evenings—that startling sound in the dusk, as though someone had thrown a brick into a quiet pool and it had grazed your heart in passing. I had accordingly looked out and mounted a fly suited to the occasion, a luscious caterpillary reddish brown creature, on a hook the size of a mayfly. This, threaded on to a strand of undrawn gut, or better still mounted on a separate six foot cast, is all that is requisite, as it can then be used from nine-thirty until ten o'clock or later, according to the hopes or delusions of the angler.

To hook a peal on rod and fly, on the free water, is an event nowadays of perhaps only weekly occurrence, but on the night in question I was fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to hook two, each of about a pound and a half—that is the commonest size—and lose them both; the first jumping on to the bank, and off again in

freedom, and the second after a hustling run along the surface of a dozen yards.

I have never been lucky at peal on this river, as August is really the best month; my largest being only 1 lb. 12 oz., with few adventures of anything over that weight. The heaviest fish I have seen was four pounds and a quarter, hooked and played on trout tackle and a light Hardy rod at half past ten, after a desperately exciting struggle with a landing net licensed to carry sixteen ounces inside.

On this particular evening the free water was at its best; but it must be understood that this word is used in relation with a very poor standard—a standard so poor, that evening after evening we had to be content with either touching a peal, or bringing home a trout of eight ounces, or even of eight inches.

The most barefaced netting had always been resorted to, beginning at day break on the second of February, when some hundreds of forlorn little trout were hauled out by the local fishermen; followed by periodical visits after larger trout or peal on summer nights. Under such circumstances the rod has a miserable chance, and accordingly a two mile stretch of perfect water is rendered almost useless. No one but an enthusiast would go—and we belonged to that genus.

As however it is the only part of the river where no restriction is made as to wading, the pleasure of getting into the cool water after a sweltering July day, and of thus exploring

unreachable creeks and pockets on the other side, can easily be understood. An old pair of carpet slippers or tennis shoes is all the equipment required; for thistles, nettles, or bracken soon lose their sting, or are disregarded, as the evening rise dapples the surface or catches the ear from the pools under the red cliff and the sycamores.

As no other rod was out that evening, we divided the upper meadow between us, and separated at a quarter to eight to seek adventures and sport each in our own way, agreeing to meet below swing gates at ten o'clock and tell each other all about it.

I should like to be able to convey to others the sense of absolute pleasure derived from sitting on that bank and looking out over the river. After fifteen years knowledge of nearly all that has been done each season—and of what a modest aggregate the all consists of—it is surprising that one can begin evening after evening with renewed hope and interest. Yet so it is, and I really believe if the water were privately owned, were stocked with two pounders, whose appetites were attuned to surface feeding, and I were given the only ticket to fish it, the old spell would be broken.

All the same if any philanthropist will try the experiment, and enclose a stamped envelope for the return of his permit, I shall be happy to give him my address and will let him know how I get on at the end of the following month.

One factor we had quite forgotten—the tide. It was so badly up that it quite prevented my friend from getting across to the other side. My upper beat was clear, being above the influence of anything but a spring tide backed up by a south wind. I regret to say my friend's plight, doomed to cast into brackish water, which we all knew was no good, did not enter my mind until later on. Wading quietly in just below the island I found small fish rising well; with some that looked better higher up out of casting distance.

After doing my best with each fly that seemed suitable, I had to confess that they beat me altogether. Each one in turn would rise and salute the fly with a splash the first time it passed over him, the evident message being 'all right old sport, I see it, don't trouble further.' After this attention they continued to feed in their own way, sometimes a few inches from the fly.

I tried in every place, making casts that never went wrong, with gut points that lay on the water like cobweb—it is always easy to do this when fish are not taking. Never did the rod throw better, never did the fly pitch more temptingly. They would rise at it, but nothing more. I tried striking the very moment the ring appeared, sometimes even in anticipation; but it was no use, I could not get them.

At dusk I stopped, after getting one small trout on a downstream cast while crossing the stickle, and walked down the meadow wondering

whether B—— had bicycled home disgusted with the tide.

Before I got close enough to see him I could hear the welcome swish of his rod. 'Is that you' he said 'have you done anything?' 'No, practically nothing.' 'Well, come down here quickly—fair sized yellow fly; they are taking like mad. All our experience is upset. I have got a full dozen, of sorts—there he's missed it—one of a pound and several tidy fish. To think of our always being told that it was no good when the tide was up. I have never done this in the last seven years; and should not have believed it.'

The rise was nearly over: he got another, I got two pulls, and after that we whipped away for ten minutes into blank darkness without result. While he was getting off his wading stockings I examined the fish—a really good miscellaneous basket—fourteen trout, ranging from little three ouncers to several of over half a pound, one of three quarters, and the big one which proved an ounce over our estimate. We reeled up and walked home in triumph, B—— pushing his machine and recounting the evening's adventures. My envy quickly vanished under his pleasant assurance that 'you could have done just the same had you been down here.'

So here was another case of listen to everybody, but try everything too. Seven brace of trout, half of them above the preserved water limit of nine inches, from the Free water, when

the tide was full up. This was in our small world a record-breaking feat. Had we been reminded of the tide before starting, we both agreed we should not have gone. Others said they did not go for that reason.

We tried it the next evening: but no: not four by honours two deals running. We were dealt a few trumps, but nothing to count beyond the pleasure of theorising explanations.

Orthodoxy in fly fishing is a hideous mistake. It stifles initiative and cramps experiment: two of the finest and most pleasurable attributes of angling. Was it Brougham who said of Macaulay 'If I could feel as sure of anything, as he is of everything, I should be satisfied'?

THE NIGHTJAR: OR FERN OWL.

An Afternoon Walk—The Nightjar's Egg—Oxshott Woods—Nightingales and Mayflies.

> And pleasures flow so thick and fast
> Upon his heart, that he at last
> Must needs express his love's excess
> With words of unmeant bitterness.
>
> COLERIDGE.

> They answer and provoke each other's song.
>
> COLERIDGE.

THE scene to be recalled is that of a close and somewhat misty June evening, when a heavy thunder shower which is popularly supposed to have settled the weather, has as a matter of fact unsettled it for weeks or months; when the sun, which rose in unclouded splendour, is sinking behind the heavily dripping fir trees, and is half obscured by the exhalations from a swampy heath and an overheated soil; when all the birds, who have remained mute and motionless while the thunder rolled among the hills and the rain flashed down like bayonets, have once more come forth from their hiding places, as though resolved to attend vespers together, and to

testify to Nature their intention of praising their creator; when the man and the maid, who have taken sweet counsel together in a stroll through the woods instead of attending Whit-Sunday evening service, and who, like the rest of those that perish, have acted as troglodytes during the fury of the storm, sally forth from the shelter of a bank and hasten homewards in the gloaming, fearful of the lateness of the hour; when the new moon sails high in the heavens, and the soft west wind causes a miniature shower to fall from every pine and silver birch on to the knee deep bracken and drooping bluebells.

At such a time as this, and in such a locality, the wavering churr of the fern owl is bound to arrest attention, even if the bird is not itself seen sailing or flapping its wings over its back between us and the lowering sky. I had often seen nightjars, had listened to their humming on warm evenings, when the landrail responded with its unvarying call, which had I thought a complaining scrape in it, and noted the contrast between the querulous and discordant voice from the rich meadow, and the droning content uttered by the nightjar from the high elms on the other side of the road.

I had often tried, in the gathering dusk, to watch their wheeling forms as they played round me in their erratic hawking after insects. I had often had their eggs brought to me by country children. But never, until this Whit-Sunday evening, had I found one myself. The

rain had given over, and the woods and common seemed literally alive with bird life, jays, cuckoos, and woodpeckers.

Only a few minutes before I had heard, for the first time that year, the r-r-r-r-r of the nightjar, when, under a larger clump of larches than usual, I saw one fly round the trees. A few steps ahead another—evidently the hen bird, seemed to be wafted up from the ground, and flew round uttering a low guttural note like 'ku-ep' with each gyration. I at once guessed that something more than chance chained both birds to the spot.

One peep among the ferns was enough: there, upon the half dry fir spines, lay an egg. Had a cuckoo dropped it, it could not seemingly have been laid in a more unlikely place. Yet the nightjars intended the spot to be their house and home for some weeks to come. From a distance of ten or fifteen feet the appearance of the egg was pure white; so white indeed, that it would have attracted the attention of the most unobservant passer by. If the bad reputation which jays enjoy of egg suckers be true, it is wonderful that a bird like a nightjar, which lays on the ground in the open, and in the very places where jays abound, is able to hatch out its clutch.

Though the wild duck and the moor hen contrive to cover their nest when they leave it, the nightjar makes no such attempt. Yet the eggs of this bird have no protective mimicry to rely upon, as have those of the plover which

are hard enough to see even a few yards away from the nest. As a matter of fact the nightjar's eggs are not white, but are most artistically blotched with grey and amber. The one colour overlies the other so distinctly as to look as though the eggs had been coloured by hand, first with a brush of the grey paint, and then with a second brush containing the richer brown.

They are in form, no less than in colouring, quite unmistakable; and should not be confounded with those of any other British bird even if the situation of the nest—but there is no nest—were unknown. They are almost an exact oval, that is to say the thick and the thin ends are hard to detect. In shape and size, as well as in polish, they are like a woodpigeon's; so much so that a clever artist in days to come, when nightjar's eggs are as valuable as those of the great auk, might colour the pure white eggs of the woodpigeon so as to deceive many a buyer.

The nightjar's family, like the pigeons, consists of two; so that the single egg I saw had probably been laid that day. Had not I felt sure it could not escape detection, being so very close to a footpath, I should have left it: but, knowing how all the boys of the village would be upon the prowl on the Whitmonday holiday, it would have been too mortifying to seek out the place the next day and find nothing. In all probability the birds made another home, as the female would be bound to lay her second egg, and I felt that by taking this one I should

never have any excuse, or any desire, to do so again.

The bird is far from uncommon, especially in the southern counties, and can be heard and seen as near to London as Wimbledon Common. The open heaths of Surrey, in any place whose name ends with 'shott, Aldershot, Bagshot, Oxshott, Eushott, nightjars are regular visitants, arriving long after many other migratory birds have eggs and young. In colouring the nightjar is sombre almost as sombre as a London sparrow, and in habits crepuscular and nocturnal.

The mouth, for it has very little actual beak, is edged with bristles or vibrissæ, thereby aiding it to catch the insects on which it feeds.

Although known in certain districts as the 'Fern owl,' and the 'nighthawk,' it is more akin to the swifts and swallows both in food and flight. The term 'goatsucker' or *caprimalgus* is a delusion void of all foundation like the mythical thunderbolt; and, as a matter of fact, the bird would be physically unable to attempt any such action.

An interesting feature to naturalists is the serrated claw of the nightjar, seeing that no actual use has ever been discovered for so curious a characteristic. One theory which is accepted by Bree, and other 'separate-creation' naturalists, as a proven and patent fact, is that the pectinated claw is used for combing out the rictal bristles which surround the bird's mouth.

Bree goes so far as to twit evolutionists on this point, and asks them how they can possibly

explain so beautiful an adaptation. "To imagine that this comb, on the claw of the long middle toe, is an accidental variation, would be the inference that such a variation could have been produced by successive steps through a long series of years." Darwinians will own, with something like a sigh, that there are many more difficult matters to account for by natural selection than this one.

Both Alfred Newton and Seebohm—the latter an evident evolutionist—are far more cautious; "whilst Naumann was of opinion that it was of service to the bird when perched lengthwise on the branches." With regard to the rictal bristles it must be remarked that in many genera of the Family they are absent, although the serrated claw is still present, which Bree may possibly have overlooked.

For myself, I venture to think that the file-like claw can assist the bird in holding, or possibly in scaling, its insect prey, upon somewhat the same principle that rowers have the handle of an oar roughed with a file to prevent its slipping from their grasp.

How many a common is there now where the beetle is allowed to continue his droning flight untouched by the nightjar or the kestrel; and where golf balls lie ensconced in places where the fern owl laid her eggs. The making of golf courses is one of those deruralising processes which have waged war against the birds, by rooting up the bracken fern, and making the rough places smooth and lawn-like.

Within the past ten years thousands of acres have been thus treated; so that the man who strolls out in the calm of a June evening across the common, now listens in vain for the soothing chur-r-r which used to make him watch for the flap of those mystic wings against the moonlit sky.

Following fast in the track of the golf links, come asphalte and lamp posts, with the laying out of the old tangled common into summer gardens with band stands, or into recreation grounds for the children—yes, for that generation of children who will in ages to come possess automatic nightjars and mechanical nightingales, and who may be happier and longer lived for the changes in their environment.

Birds too, which are being displaced by the improvement to commons, are the whinchat, and the stonechat—both very familiar in one's daily walks about Esher and Wimbledon. The lapwing also, and the green woodpecker, are being driven further afield since the days when we used to hunt Arbrook Common and the Oxshott Woods for the eggs and nests respectively. Those woods still contain a surprising amount of bird life; abounding with jays, cuckoos, long tailed tits and woodpeckers all the early summer.

Among the less familiar birds, which I have either seen or found the nests of in this district —which is after all only seventeen miles from London—are the turtle-dove, kestrel, sparrow hawk, greater spotted woodpecker, red backed shrike, crossbill, golden crested wren, horned

owl, nuthatch, and hawfinch. On many evenings, when taking a two hour walk, I used to make a list of the different species seen from door to door; and found that it compared favourably in the matter of numbers with walks in far more distant places.

All the borders and approaches to these woods are haunted by nightingales, thus making a walk, after ten o'clock on a calm May evening, a pleasure to look forward to.

At intervals during the day, especially in the afternoon, the birds sing freely in the tangled sides of Woodstock Lane, between Long-Ditton and Claygate, their nests being only too readily found—I hope this is not adding to the knowledge of nest robbing boys—in the nettle-covered banks of the broad ditches skirting the road. Even until the young are hatched they will continue their song; although it is never so full or intense after the eggs are laid. An angler may take the nightingale's song as a prelude to mayfly fishing. He will recall listening to the nightingales answering one another, as he sat on a hatch stile in the moonlight on his way back to the cottage, and link it with the capture of a fine brace of trout, hardly stiff in his creel, taken on an alder or a Welshman's button.

Similarly, from an angling point of view, one may always regard the nightjar as a bird of good omen. On a fine open stretch of the Itchen, where a narrow peninsula faces due west, I can associate many a splendid splashing in

the shallows from a lusty trout on a spent-gnat or straddle bug, with the erratic hawking of a pair of nightjars; so close indeed round the rod that the probability of foul-hooking one could not have been very remote.

THE EAGLE OWL.

A Glimpse of Ceylon.

We wandered to the river as the sun
Was setting, now the sultry day was done;
We saw the purple darkness close around,
We watched the river mist from off the ground
Rise as a mantle o'er the shadowy palms
That swayed their feathery heads and rustled soft
Rocked in the night wind's arms.

IF the reader will accompany me in spirit, we will saunter along a jungle path together in the Low Country of Ceylon. The month is January, and the North East monsoon has fairly set in, with little prospect of rain for some few months. The time is between ten and eleven at night, and it wants but one day to the full moon.

To the left are low hills, covered with the densest jungle from base to summit. Stately palms stand out in relief against the clear sky, shaking their serrated leaves. Clumps of bamboos sway and nod their feathery heads with a murmuring rustle, as the night wind creeps gently over them. The air is filled with the sound and conversation of the insect world; noisy cicadas, and stridulating beetles almost

drowning the soft humming of night-moths' wings. Clouds of fireflies vibrate, like luminous vapour, against the dark background of the foliage; round which they hover all the night long. On our right is a plain, stretching away into the misty moonlit distance as far as the horizon.

In front of us is a 'tank,' over four miles long, edged with arecas, green bamboos, and wild plantains. While watching its surface, a silver streak is seen every now and then, announcing the presence of alligators, which protrude their uncanny eyes only for a moment above the water. Far in the distance are elephants bathing—elephants in their native haunts undisturbed and unfearing. The light every now and then catches the water, which they love to cast upon their backs unceasingly. While watching them we notice one or two of their large forms disappear for a few minutes entirely under the surface. Then they emerge dripping with water, and silvered by moonlight, to recommence blowing fountains through their trunks. Apparently something scares them, and we witness a quiet but hasty retreat. One after one they shamble up the muddy bank, and disappear quite noiselessly into the gloom of the Jungle.

Let us examine this spot upon which we are standing. Masonry can be traced, although rotten and distorted, down among the snake-like roots of this huge 'banyan' tree. Kandian Kings, in the time of Daniel, may have stood

here with their engineers and courtiers, superintending the formation of this dam. Stones, trimmed and carved all over with Bhuddist hieroglyph, brought from far distant quarries, must have been laid here by trained elephants and slaves in far distant days.

To those who have read the 'Mahawanso,' it must be evident that a Cinghalese population once existed of six or seven millions, whereas to-day it is under two. The land, upon which all this Jungle and 'cheddi' now teems, must once have borne extensively terraced rice fields irrigated from this enormous reservoir. Huts, thatched with paddi straw, and villages must have nestled here under their cocoa nut trees, giving out each morning a busy swarm of labourers to till the fertile land. And where are all gone now? Perhaps some sudden call to arms obliged those peaceful people to exchange their hoes and wooden ploughs for swords and spears of steel and ebony, and to hasten off in defence of their distant capital and sacred tooth.

Or a panic stricken exodus may have been made before a death-breathing epidemic of cholera or small pox, which report told them was decimating their villages daily. A desertion of the district was made whatever may have been the cause.

The entire appearance of the land would rapidly alter as soon as it was neglected. A few short months would be sufficient for weeds, wild plants, and parasites to grow up and choke

the tender 'nellu' (rice). A few short years would amply suffice for Jungle trees, bamboos, and rattans to spring up and spread over each other, until every sign of cultivation was obliterated.

The cocoanut palms themselves would die, as soon as they missed the sound of human voices.

The slender rootlets of growing trees, insinuating themselves between the stones of the tank, would grow in time to distort, and even to throw down, powerful retaining walls. This we can see has been the case. Here are roots, large as a man's body, encircling in their strong coils blocks of stone which must have taken many slaves to lift. The water, once beginning to ooze through the crevices of the dam, would soon swell to an irresistible torrent, tearing down all its walls, and escaping over the adjoining flat land to stagnate and seethe under a scorching sun. Malaria, and Jungle fever, would quickly be generated by the rotting vegetation.

The margin of the lake is here impossible to walk on. Soft mud and decomposed rushes form the abodes of alligators and snakes, which lie in horrible enjoyment upon these pestilential beds. If we are to continue our survey of this region, we must mount upon the wings of the lotus-bird, who will waft our spirits over the tropical water lilies and shallow lagoons.

Hidden among the dank rushes here is a leopard, waiting with feline patience for his prey—a thirsty deer. Little does it know how

near its own end may be. To-morrow night will see its carcase exposed to the birds and insects. A dark and moving shadow comes upon the glittering surface of the water; and on looking up, we see the form of a huge owl floating noiselessly through the still air. Its shadow has crossed the spot where the leopard crouches. Its cry makes one's blood run cold, and would cause the poor natives to live in dread of the death of someone dear to them.

The cry itself suggests the sound of children being choked, or strangled. A low and spasmodic gurgling is preceded and followed by screams of desperate agony. This being's flight is perfectly noiseless. Hardly a feather can be seen to move, but like a ghost it haunts the scene, its red eyes gleaming luridly at the sleeping world below. This is the 'Ulama'—the Devil bird of the Cinghalese, who affirm that every living thing upon which its shadow falls will die. This can only happen upon clear and moonlit nights, as the mysterious visitor is never seen by day. We watch its form disappear over the tufted and lemon scented mâna-grass upon its plutonian mission.

Suddenly we partly awake; the noise of civilization surges to our ears, but again dies away. The opalled tank shines out clearer than before: and we roam through Jungle vines and palmyras, talipot palms, and bamboos as we once did years ago.

Across undulating 'patenas' of waving mâna-grass; past gigantic ant hills and sacred Bo

trees; through clumps of cacti, and tree ferns, starred with many a luminous insect; by hundred-rooted banyan trees, covered with rattans and parasites; along the orchid-clad sides of babbling water courses; we wend our way, breaking through the clinging and thorny tendrils of many a jungle creeper, wading across many a ferny swamp, climbing over the upraised roots of forest giants, or stooping under their spreading branches.

A sudden snort is heard, then a crash and sound of hurrying feet; and we know that some old boar has been disturbed from his favourite 'form.' We fancy we are pulling off leeches again from our bleeding ankles, while pressing through the wet grass. Then that we are being pursued by some 'rogue' elephant, while our comrades' rifle shots sing past us.

But it is of no avail. The elephant, with springy strides and uplifted trunk is rapidly gaining upon us. His jaws are seething with foam, and his hoarse and angry trumpeting seems to impel him upon his mad career. The pace has grown terrific. Bamboos, guavas, lantana and plantains brush quickly by us: and we see for a minute human forms and firelight.

Our pursuer has vanished. The sound of voices has awakened us with a start. Our spirits can only wander through these regions alone. Again the sound of English traffic asserts itself, and the chilling feel of winter's breath puts an end to all tropical reverie. We have been day-dreaming.

Once only did I succeed in obtaining a specimen of the Eagle-owl—a bird which needless to say I have never seen in England. My 'appoo' shot it, on a Casuarina tree, just outside my bungalow in Kotmali, at eight o'clock one evening. I would not believe his tale, that 'one big bird'—he stretched his arms out further than I thought they would go—is making that dreadful noise, master bring master's gun.'

I sat up skinning it that night, and it was long past twelve when I had finished, with a feeling of exultation that there was not a feather upon the table. It measured sixty five inches across the wings—two more than the largest specimen I could read of. Having stuffed it lightly with gun-tow steeped in carbolic acid, I had it hanging up in the verandah for months, by its legs from a rafter; the stock joke being that I had just shot it, as each caller noticed the beast.

As a matter of fact, I do not think it is in the least established that the eagle owl *is* the 'Ulama,' or Devil-bird, of the Cinghalese; but that is rather beyond me now. It certainly had huge red eyes, and I well remember the difficulty of getting the skin over the back of the skull sufficiently far to remove them from their sockets. Figuratively speaking, it looked the size of a turkey as the Boy brought it in; while its carcass seemed more like a mallard's, when I cut its neck free after skinning it.

HAMPSHIRE WATER MEADOWS.

THE ROMANCE OF FLY FISHING—WEEK END PLEASURES—THE BLACK GNAT TIME—AFTER THE THUNDERSTORM.

> Perhaps it would imply an excessive egoism if we were all to set ourselves down to think out the order in which we should place our pleasures . . .
> . . . There are moments that stand out in one's life memories as the best and brightest, and these in my own mind's vision, have the serene yet sparkling face of a river for their background.
>
> HORACE HUTCHINSON.

COMPARISONS are ungrateful: more so in angling perhaps than in other sports, for the reason that so many circumstances and surroundings are ancillary to the day's pleasure. To plash through the water meadows of the Avon or Itchen, to crouch behind the giant rushes or dock leaves at the water edge, to peer over and see whether the two pound trout, or grayling, is rising beyond the waving weed patch, need not be considered in any way a joy superior to that felt by the angler making his way up a Northumbrian burn or a rocky stream in Derbyshire. Nor

indeed to that felt by the same angler fishing with a wet fly upstream with a success that speaks for itself of his knowledge of where the fish lie and how they can be attracted to feed. The style and equipment of all forms of fishing may be different: but not the spirit of the sport.

To catch fish is no more the sole object of fly fishing than to get from one seaport to another the sole object of yachting; or to steer a partner round a ball room the sole object of dancing. Mere dead reckoning in either case is not the whole story. Even in the shadows of the beeches—or the palms—sitting out counts for something. The frame of mind induced by a river winding through a water-meadow is that of the sleek cows with contented eyes which breathe upon the canvasses of Mr. Arnesby Brown.

The season opens in mid April, or a full month later than the preserved water of South Devon; a plan which perhaps removes all idea of fishing with a wet fly. In the ten rod club to which I have had the pleasure to belong for the past eight years, wet fly fishing although by no means barred on the ticket has hardly been practised; whether from custom, agreement, pride, or etiquette, I cannot say. If one is forced to make comparisons I should say that there is less emulation among the members to count the number of fish in their creels at the end of the day. Hours are spent in sauntering up the bank or splashing through the flooded meadows, albeit the majority of the 'rods' live

at a distance, London, Brockenhurst or Southampton.

A charm one hardly likes to dilate upon in naked print is that Sunday fishing is not forbidden which means that a few of us, more unprincipled and perhaps less scientific than the others, are able to spend every hour of a week-end out of doors; using all the tact we can to avoid giving offence to church goers by getting away across the public meadows before ten o'clock and remaining as much out of evidence as we can until seven in Spring, or until dusk in the summer evenings.

Curiously enough, although the river is in many places not deep, wading is seldom or never resorted to. The banks are mostly unstable and fibrous, composed of chalky mud overhanging runs and channels of two or three feet deep into which I should be very sorry to step for fear either of sinking waist-high or of being carried bodily down stream.

Shallow portions occùr mostly in mid stream where islands of waving weed or celery beds afford secure cover for all the most cautious trout. It is among the glittering openings between these retreats that one looks for the rise of a feeding fish. Having found it, plans must be laid for approaching the bank behind the rushes to a place from which one may hope to cover the spot with an upstream cast.

No straight forward approach or good long cast avails for a fair sized fish. The sight or shadow of a full length figure, the wave of the

arm or even the glint of the rod, the splash of the line, each and all are too tell tale tactics to practise with any hope of success. They merely cause the rise to discontinue and the weeds to wave like mermaids' hair over the place where it had been noticed. As to thrashing away at the spot, well, you might just as profitably walk about an open field with a gun and expect the wariest woodpigeon to circle round you and be fired at.

Many years ago I remember a man telling me that in Scotland trout are counted by pounds, on Dartmoor by dozens, and in Hampshire by brace. North Country anglers would I think be surprised if the truth were told to them of the total bags that many of us secure on the Itchen. A Southampton friend wrote to me one October that 'he had enjoyed a very fair season, just fifty trout averaging 1 to 1¼ lbs., and twenty five grayling; his best trout being just under, and his best grayling just over, three pounds.'

This would probably mean forty half days spent upon the water, allowing for his absence on holiday abroad during the entire month of August. Here then is a fairly practical answer to the question 'Is that good enough?' My own answer I will give at once, very much in the affirmative as Cabinet Ministers are so fond of saying. Thankful indeed shall I be if any future season will yield so satisfactory a total. Under the conditions of *mens sana in corpore sano,* and pleasant weather, I will be content

with half; knowing that the enjoyment to be obtained therefrom will outbalance that of any other form of sport which is likely to be presented to me.

During the opening fortnight of the season the fish are not in anything like the game condition that they acquire after a fine week in May. The red quill is one of the favourite and most effective flies particularly on the side streams where the smaller trout—our limit is three quarters of a pound—are mostly taken. For the last two years I have more or less discarded the winged patterns finding that hackle flies float quite as well, and are more likely to hold when the strike is made.

For some reason too a gold-ribbed Hare's ear dressed with reversed wings has gained a great reputation particularly on windy days when one has to pick and choose a likely place according to the various bends of the river. Fortunately this can nearly always be managed even with a nasty north or north-west wind which sometimes prevails week after week. For the idea of the reversed wing dressing we are all indebted to Mr. H. K. Grierson who had them made to his fancy by Messrs. Cox & Macpherson of Southampton, from whom they can no doubt be obtained. What the insect may be which they imitate, others must guess or explain; but it will sometimes take good fish when nothing else will.

I must frankly say I prefer softer weather, and less good sport, seeing that there is very

little cover or protection on open water meadows such as one gets on streams which are bounded by a steep bank or cliff on one side. It is for a fortnight prior to the mayfly that I have during each year always obtained my best baskets, a black gnat, alder, and Welshman's button being at that time the most killing flies. The twenty seventh of May is a date I cannot help always associating with red letter luck. On the twenty seventh of May, on a Devonshire river, the best angler of that district caught twenty seven trout, 'several of them pounders,' a catch which was the envy and talk of the club at the time and first caused a limit (six brace) to be fixed by the owner of the water.

On the twenty-seventh of May, on the Itchen, I had the best day's sport I ever enjoyed in point of size and number. During the entire morning the fish rose and accepted nearly everything that was nicely offered to them so much so that when a thunder storm brewed up at 2 p.m. the opinion of each man passing down the water was 'all is over for to-day.' Everyone left the river but myself. For some dogged reason—chiefly that being out for the day I wanted to have my full measure—I made up my mind to stick it out until the storm was over.

It proved a thoroughly nasty time; the thunder storm working round and round with many alarming lightning flashes and torrents of rain which made me feel a fool for my pains.

Fortunately I did not know at the time that some cattle had been struck by lightning. At five o'clock being far up the water I made for the only small inn there was, some three quarters of a mile away, arriving to tea with a rainproof coat in a state of liquefaction. After an hour's rest I set off down the river wishing I had taken the advice tendered me.

The rain still continued but the storm had at last grumbled itself out. Half way home a change came, the rain showed every sign of stopping while the sky to the westward became so much brighter that it looked as though the sun intended to peep through before setting behind a heavy bank of cloud. There was a long and broad stretch of water between two bends where both banks were edged with dense rushes, a deep and weedy place where sport as a rule was only good on August evenings with sedge flies. While watching to see if the river was coloured after the rain I saw a rise, then another in mid stream,—small grayling no doubt. The fly I had on was a medium sized Welshman's button quite good enough for anything under the unfavourable conditions.

Going down to the lower end of the rushes I faced upstream to see whether anything could be done. Within the space of a few minutes several rises occurred all of them far out in mid stream. At the first cast a fish took the fly instantly, sprang out of the water and was off, a splendid yellow trout. Above him was another rise, the fly pitched badly to one side

but he rushed at it was struck, and was on; a good trout. After some really violent behaviour he was landed and laid on the path (1 lb. 7 ounces). On coming back to the rushes, or rather into the rushes, I could see as many as a dozen fish mostly out of reach rising in all directions but, being in a foot of water, I was so low down that it was difficult or impossible to get out a long line. Each rise that was covered was taken instantly and apparently rejected the very next second. Two more I lost, one small, the other a heavy fish. Then I landed one of just over a pound, lost another and caught the next a pound and a quarter.

All this half hour the rain was having its final patter, just blurring the surface sufficiently, while the sun was doing its best to cast a shadow. It certainly seemed the most ideal evening to come out. The only drawback in my personal case was soaking wet clothing. No other angler reappeared or it would have interested me to know whether the trout were rising in other parts of the river in the same frantic manner.

THE MAYFLY.

OLD STYLE AND NEW STYLE—SHAKESPEARE AND GILBERT WHITE—THE MAYFLY—ITS LIFE AND HISTORY—MAYFLY FISHING.

> Now with religious awe, the farewell light
> Blends with the solemn colouring of night;
> Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale,
> Tracking the fitful motions of the gale.
>
> WORDSWORTH.

IF telegraph operators ever give thought to the meaning of messages that they read off the wires, I have often wondered what they think in London Offices of those which tell the busy men of Lloyds or Lincoln's Inn that 'the mayfly is up'; and which as a rule defer this piece of news until the first two days of June.

Gilbert White, in his Naturalist's Calendar, relating chiefly to the years near 1768, when he noted the dates on which flowers opened, or migratory birds arrived, gives "Angler's May Fly (*Ephemera Vulgata*) June 3rd to 14th." As the year 1768 happened to be somewhat

backward, one may perhaps put the usual date two days earlier. Even this makes good the misnomer by placing the mayfly festival in the month of June.

The Eleven Days.

Of course we are all supposed to know about the change in the calendar from Old Style to New Style, and the consternation it caused by the loss of the eleven days. Well, equally of course, we all do not. I, for one, had forgotten about it, but I have now 'read it up,' so cannot resist giving my rehash of this educational morsel.

Scotland, it appears, changed its calendar in the year 1600, but sleepy old England waited for another hundred and fifty years before she made the reform; just as she may wait another hundred and fifty before she adopts a decimal coinage system, such as Ceylon enjoyed long before I used to live there. Russia, as we know, still keeps to the Old Style, so is now I suppose some thirteen days wrong, by not omitting the leap years at the beginning of 1800, and 1900.

The change was made here in London in the autumn of 1752, by the suppression of all the days between September 2nd and September 14th; which caused such a commotion among the ignorant, that they petitioned the Government to 'give us back our eleven days.'

Well, it is interesting to note how the dates of seasons and festivals differ between the time

of Shakespeare and Gilbert White. All Shakespeare's flowers and seasons seem described as being ten days too early. Shakespeare's month of April was really the period from about April 11th to May 10th. His spring sounds far more genial than ours does now. The mayfly time then was from May 18th to May 28th instead of that given in the History of Selborne.

Similarly, Shakespeare's autumn and early winter give us the opposite impression. They sound more rigorous than nowadays. His November began on November 10th or 11th, and his Christmas Day on January 4th or 5th. Many of the old weather proverbs, about April showers, or hawthorn, become far more correct than they appear to be when we consider that dancing round the maypole, instead of taking place on our May 1st, was held ten days later. The saying 'when the days begin to lengthen *et cet,*' is true under either style, as the process is not much noticed until after mid January.

The Mayfly.

The following paragraphs are taken from *Chambers' Encyclopædia,* as being useful and descriptive.

Ephemera ('day fly' or May-fly), a genus of well known insects which appear in vast numbers on summer evenings from rivers, canals, and ponds, and after a short merry life disappear as suddenly as they came. The genus *Ephemera* is type of the family *Ephemeridæ* or

May-flies in the wide sense. The family is often ranked within the *Pseudo-neuroptera* sub-order of *Orthoptera,* not far from Dragon-flies.

A thin delicate body, with filmy wings, of which the anterior are much the larger and sometimes the only pair: rudimentary mouth-parts in the adults, which fast throughout their short ærial life: a long lived voracious larval existence in the water, with so called tracheal gills for aquatic respiration, are striking features of the Ephemerids.

The antennæ are short and awl-shaped; the eyes of the males are very large; the head-shield is enlarged, covering the rudimentary mouth-parts; the middle ring of the thorax is exaggerated; the legs are delicate; the thin abdomen ends in two or three long filaments.

The life history of these delicate ephemeral insects is very interesting. The eggs are laid in the water and give rise to aquatic larvæ, which live sometimes two or three years, moulting many times.

They prefer running water, hide under stones or make burrows in the mud, have well developed mouth-parts, and feed hungrily enough on other insects. The tracheæ or air-tubes are expanded in plate-like or tuft-like paired structures down the sides of the posterior body.

A pupa stage eventually follows, during which the larva acquires wings and other adult structures, but the insect which emerges and leaves the water is, curiously enough, not yet

ready for its short adult life. Though it has wings, it is still encumbered by a delicate robe.

This sub-imago, as it is often called, finds some resting place on grass stem or tree trunk, gets rid of its last encumbrance, and begins its life of a day.

The cast-off ghost-like exuviæ are found in great numbers. In the summer evening the males and females enjoy a brief merry love-dance. The females are fertilised, the eggs are dropped into the water, and then sometimes in a single day the bright crowd is gone. It is literally true that at the moment of their climax they die.

The most familiar species is *Ephemera vulgata,* the common may-fly, the green drake (sub-imago) and gray drake of anglers.

Mayfly Fishing.

As a rule, the mayfly week offers an ideal holiday to the angler; giving to many a man his first real summer outing in the water meadows. My earliest experience of it was vastly different. Keen disappointment, accompanied by equally keen north wind, was the first introduction I had to the so called carnival of mayfly fishing. Wind swept meadows, bending rushes, and a cold gray river hurrying towards you in waves and eddies, formed the conditions and prospect of the glorious first of June in that year; and continued, with slight changes of a more favourable nature, until the sixth.

Facing the wind on the opening day, I

looked in vain for the mayfly, which I was told might appear between eleven and twelve o'clock. It was impossible to find any turn or curve in the bank where the water was quieter, so after two hours of waiting in the driving rain, I speared my rod in the rushes, stood in its shelter, and shivered. Later in the afternoon a few mayflies could be seen, carried along in midstream like dead leaves in October, but no attempt at a rise broke the surface.

As a matter of fact, even in favourable weather, trout are rather chary at making such a mouthful as a mayfly appears to them; but after the first day or two they put this feeling aside, and only temper their extreme greediness by an aggravating caution as to how, when, and where they shall indulge themselves. It was three days before I saw a mayfly taken—perhaps by a smallish grayling—and although I thrashed different patterns over the place he never rose again.

Not only did I not catch a trout, but neither did anyone else on that part of the river. However it is no use dilating upon so chilling an experience, excepting just to show that those who use rosy-hued ink in describing their holiday sport have had, like many better men, to go through the mill of adverse conditions during a previous season.

It is the enthusiasm engendered by certain matchless half hours that prompts us to spend half days, or even half weeks, by river banks under almost hopeless circumstances.

Looking back on it now, I had of course acted as the young man in a hurry; for, although the greater part of the mayfly season that year was a failure owing to the weather, yet between the sixth and twelfth of June numerous two and three pounders were killed—I never like this word applied to trout: it always sounds more applicable to spearing eels or flat fish—on spent gnat late in the evening.

Other seasons, other conditions. The very next year the 'Fly is up' telegram came at Whitsuntide; and on the second of June the thermometer touched 80 in the shade. In making my way to the small hut by the river side, the long grass, the air, and the water were literally swarming with mayflies. They were on one's bare neck and arms, almost in one's mouth. They danced up and down in thousands. Those that fluttered on to the water were not taken by the fish, who possessed their appetites in patience until between four and five o'clock.

I knew little or nothing of their various stages or life history, but kept affixing and changing 'gladstones,' 'grey-drakes,' and 'straddle bugs'; continually throwing over rises in feverish excitement until it was dark, with the only result of a pound grayling—the first I had ever seen. Other rods were more successful of course. A trout of 3¼ lbs. was laid on the side bar at the inn where 'no four-penny beer served here' secured comparative privacy. I touched it, or rather worshipped it,

with mournful envy, wondering if I should ever land such a prize—and I never have yet.

The next day, I was upon the water soon after eleven; taking up a position just where a double turn in the narrows formed some tempting green glides close under the steep bank. After a short time three fish were located, evidently trout, from the determined snap which caused a mayfly to disappear as though it had trodden on a steel trap. On the opposite side, luckily well away from the water, beyond a clump of brambles and reeds I had an audience, two men; who not only meant to stop, but had spotted the three fish and pointed them out to each other. 'You see, he'll get 'em all' I heard the one say; a remark which so touched my pride that I determined to live up to this prophetic reputation in spite of the fact that I had never caught a trout upon a mayfly in my life.

Nothing went wrong: I was able to get fairly close below the upper fish, cast my gladstone at the head of the run, and before realising quite what had happened, tightened into a nice trout, netting him almost at my feet (1 lb. 6 ounces) to the huge satisfaction of the chief actor, and the audience on the bank. Both the others followed his greedy example at the first cast, 1 lb. 1 ounce, and 1 lb. 4 ounces—the best trio I had ever taken consecutively.

Never did the words 'I told you so' sound so sweetly in anyone's ears as on that occasion. Inwardly I vowed the reward that mugs of

flowing ale should moisten the lips of the utterer.

After this the fly was only taken by the very largest grayling, which, on being hooked, bore down stream like small salmon in their first rush. It soon became easy to tell them from trout. They constantly missed the fly, and always left a bubble on the surface after doing so; besides showing their large back fin as they turned away. If they took the fly and were held hard, a constant wriggling motion, as well as their persistent pulling down stream settled all doubt. As I had a distaste to landing and unhooking them, I found after a few days, that the easiest way was to let them get well below one in the current, and then give the line a sharp tweak, which usually brought about the desired parting.

One rise, where a long cast had to be made upstream, over some rushes, and right into the sunlight, was followed by a gollop, a strike, and a course downstream that made the reel seem a humming top until the line was out to its last few yards of backing. Although I had hurried after it with the rod bent down to the water—quite a wrong position for the situation—he was round the bend into a deep channel, and strong current, before I could check him.

For fully five minutes I could do nothing but hold on; standing out in a tongue of mud at the end of the rushes, where a deepish dyke came into the main stream.

The strain on the rod was so great that I

held it straight out, and slowly ground him up from the reel foot by foot, unable to put the rod down and handline him. As he came near, all I could see was a large rush, apparently on the fish's back, with both fish and rush athwart the stream.

It was the largest grayling I have seen, hooked foul right through the spines of its great dorsal fin. It was so completely done up that, when released, it floated away round the bend with only a gasping movement.

The spring-balance I had in my bag only drew out to two pounds and it was obvious cruelty to impale the wretched fish on so useless a gauge as this. Had this grayling been taken in season, he should certainly have been mounted, for only once have I seen his equal, in a glass case, caught by a Southampton angler, and labelled as an ounce under four pounds.

On rivers where one can secure a piece of water to oneself after tea time towards the end of the mayfly season, and in the exact spot where the memories of bygone Junes recreate the sport and successes of previous years, the fascination of again watching the water causes one to think how little human nature, and human instincts, have changed during the past few thousand years.

How old Horace would have loved fly fishing: that is if trout abound in the Bandusian stream, as they do in the Bidassoa. How he would

have sat upon the bank on a summer afternoon waiting for the shadows to lengthen, and have conjured up the ivory forms of Cloe or of Lalage glancing under the deeper water, or sitting in a shallow with wet hair clinging to their supple-moulded backs.

How he would have recalled their voices—'dulce ridentem dulce loquentem'—babbling among the stones; and then have grasped his willow rod, as a deep-toned ploop told him that a trout had begun to suck down flies under the tallest clump of iris close to the opposite bank.

These thoughts of naiads of the stream come over us all—so strongly indeed at seasons, that it is some time before we can rouse ourselves to focus our eyes and realise that it is time to be up and doing, if we intend to discard these waking dreams, and take full advantage of that delicious half hour between sunset and dusk which the gods have provided. Horace must have loved the birds, as he loved nature's changing face, and the fleeting seasons that passed over his whitening head on the Sabine farm, but left his heart as ruddy as Falernian wine.

THE MAYFLY IN HAMPSHIRE.

The First Half of June.

It seems a day
(I speak of one from many singled out)
One of those heavenly days which cannot die.

WORDSWORTH.

The lovely toy so fiercely sought
Hath lost its charm by being caught.

BYRON.

IF one were to eliminate the charm of the weather during early June, when the pleasure of the lengthening days still asserts itself, and prolongs the evening until nearly nine o'clock, I must own that I should not care so much for mayfly fishing.

The season however, when it is kind, brings such good sport, and affords so perfect an out-door holiday, that no one need wonder at the worship of the mayfly: particularly by men who have not taken up dry fly fishing young enough to love its very difficulties, or who honestly say they prefer a heavy creel after three hours fishing to an eight hour day spent by the river.

What surprises one at the first introduction to mayfly tackle is the comparative strength of the cast and size of the fly. There is no

denying, from what one hears about the bags made on privately owned water, where the fish will take readily, that it must be an easy process to attract, hook, and land them. Even in boat fishing on a lake, stories are frequently told of the cast blowing overboard, and being at once seized by a good fish. This experience too has befallen more than one beginner about to fish from the bank or a bridge.

Of recent years mayfly tackle has become more delicate. The casts are finer, and the flies smaller; the result being that the style of fishing approximates far more to plain dry fly as practised with red quill, or black gnat, during the preceding month. I am quite sure that the man, who has never thrown a mayfly until he has graduated in all the troubles and blanks of several previous seasons, becomes more successful than his friend who perhaps boasts of the fish he caught the first day he ever received an invitation to good private water in a favoured first week of June. As a rule, one is I think prone to cast far too quickly, carelessly, and frequently with the mayfly: to take too little trouble in approaching the water and the rising fish. The tendency is to underrate your enemy before he is hooked, and to overrate him after you have done so.

In spite of seven or eight years experience, I often find it more difficult to attract a good feeding trout with a mayfly in June than with a sedge in August or September. No doubt, much depends upon the individual craftiness of

the fish. Should he have been hooked and lost under weeds, we can well imagine that the adventure has made more than an ephemeral impression; as the process of hauling at a trout of two pounds, which has managed to twist the line round rootlets or tendrils strong enough to cause a break, must be lengthy and alarming.

To strike and prick the same fish a month earlier with a small fly is a very different matter. The tiny barb catches in the side of his horny lip, he shakes his head—perhaps jumping out of the water at the same time—and is free. He may hardly realise what happened, beyond that his power of movement was curtailed for a second. He need not necessarily associate this with the fly he rose at: therefore you may get him the same afternoon. As trout feeding on spent gnat in the evening are well able to take as many as twenty in the space of an hour, it becomes obvious folly to cast at anything in a hurry.

Choose a turn in the river if possible, where the current takes all floating matter quietly against the opposite side. If some nasty bushes or stakes protrude from the somewhat overhanging bank, rendering the pitch of an artificial fly extremely awkward, so much the better; for it may easily be that some other rod has rejected the place on that account, finding it too difficult. Depend upon it that is why the ideal places, which catch the eye on a first walk upstream, prove so often delusive.

There is no drawback to them: consequently they inherit an unlucky name among the more superstitious trout, who have missed too many relations from the tempting spot to be keen about annexing the run as an easy food provider.

It is a time full of suppressed excitement. You have been fortunate to get the place to yourself. The fly is coming down, and you can locate two, at least, thoroughly good trout who are taking it confidently and with relish. A very noticeable fact also is that the flies which give the faintest movement or flutter are always the first to go. Many that lie motionless are allowed to drift along, first over riser number one, and then over the lower fellow. Both of them are old hands and have so far kept their places for several days, despite the tramp of the passing angler.

You must wait for a time, and make quite sure that you can hit the distance exactly with your fly. Time it, if possible, so that it comes over the lower fish just after he has taken one. Two throws, if correctly made, are ample if he does not respond. You stand uneasily in the chalky mud, trying to double some rushes under your feet to delay the sinking process. You can already feel, and hear, your boots settling down in the ooze. You can even smell the subsidence as well, so if inclined you can light your pipe by way of passing the time and changing the odour from miasma to nicotine. Provided you think your pattern is right do not

trouble to change the fly. Much may have depended upon how it sat on the water when you made the previous casts. One never knows in what light the trout regards the fly looking up from below. *His* point of view can be rudely imitated by placing flies in an uncut finger bowl half filled with water.

He has risen again; after a longish pause. You make your throw: it narrowly misses a nasty prong of bush: the current carries it right under the clump of docks, far closer to the bank than where the fish rose: for a moment you almost lose sight of it as the eddy turns it edgways to you: but this turning movement has seemingly endued it with life, for there is a suck, you strike, and the line is taut with a throb, throb, that bends the rod in earnest.

He is on: hold him for all you are worth or he will bolt under the overhanging blackberry bush, which touches the water, and will 'saw' himself off on the edge of a spine. He is a trout all right—no grayling pulls so viciously as that. It is a glorious minute of pulsating suspense, a minute well worth the sixty mile journey, or a cost of a penny a second. He can stick it no longer but comes to the surface at last preparatory to another vigorous dive.

He has got below you, just where you cannot move and follow him. He is in a clear pool, fortunately, and must be given no law. The cast, fly, and attachment are all in favour of the net doing its duty. Nearer he comes with

no disposition to lie over on his side. He is dipped out still protesting breathlessly. One pound nine ounces, a short golden fish as firm as rubber, and as handsome as paint.

The obsequies are over. You are back in the same place; but number one is not. Or if he is, he has dined well and wisely and is taking his siesta afterwards. Perhaps it is no good moving: all depends upon one's temperament. Probably I should; and do less well than by stopping. One great advantage in the place is that there are no grayling. It is distinctly a trout beat. Number one, or a new one, may appear any moment.

By an effort that nearly leaves your boots in the mud, you emerge to try elsewhere—with the result that you come upon grayling. No: number one must be revisited. The deep tone of his swallow sounds as though it came from a capacious throat. After all, he is there; and as to his caution—well, any man on a subscription water after a week of mayfly thrashing knows what to expect. Besides, fancy if you leave him, and the place is taken by another rod, who gets him.

You once more wedge yourself into the old position, arrange the rushes round you, oil the hackle of your fly, straighten out the landing net, stick it butt end into the mud, and fix your attention upstream. Some more fly comes down. There is a new riser, a trout certainly, just in the middle between the two weed patches taking fly after fly. You can see his broad

tail doing its work in the current. Get your fly to head the next real one that is coming down. *Habetne?*

He has got it, is being firmly held as he comes all the way to the net right on the top of the water, splashing like a moorhen. He is hooked as securely as a trace, with the cast in addition right round his head and under both gills. As exactly a pound fish as one could draw to scale, smallish but game. He ought to have had a more open chance; but war is war with woe to the vanquished.

Now I cannot describe the capture of number one: for I did not get him. I saw him rise frequently, and am convinced to this day he was the real three pounder for which I am waiting. All I can say in my favour is that he not only declined my flies—for I tried several at intervals—but many and many a real one; selecting only those which gave a movement as they passed. He had a sailor's eye for rig, had overheard some conversation, had taken hold of something that stuck in his head, and had formed a resolution of 'no flutter no rise' which he was adhering to.

All the same I got another that evening, though with a downstream cast, in the dusk at what I really thought was a rat. He bored to the bottom and stuck there, seemingly in weed; but after I had shortened up below him, he gave way easily and got into a clump of muddy rushes. After a considerable amount of pulling, lifting, and struggling the fly came away. His

way back to the water was easy enough: my way towards him extremely difficult and dirty. Groping about in the mud I at last felt his form and managed to get him out; altogether a clumsy and unsporting proceeding, as he had to be well washed before taking his place with the others.

On the way back I got entangled in a clump of that huge weed or plant that resembles rhubarb; the great prickly leaves being well over my head as I stumbled knee deep among their boggy roots. Afraid to push on for fear of getting into still deeper ground, I had to back out, and strike a better line home across the ditches, hot, itchy, dirty and wet.

Speaking of mayfly fishing in connection with the eyesight or discernment of trout, I had an example the next morning that was rather interesting. There is a deep and unused lock in one of the side branches of the river, indeed part of an old canal, the lower end to which is blocked by large bushes, growing at either side of the masonry; with a dense and deep muddy pool between them. No one, even with thigh boots or waders, could venture into it, so that the place is practically unfishable excepting from the lock wall some ten feet above it, in both senses of the word. Walking up to the edge of the lock, as I had often foolishly done on previous occasions, one usually caught sight of a good fish who doubled under a bush or a weed before his size could be estimated.

On the morning in question I had ample leisure; so, before approaching the lock, I lay down on my stomach just behind a weed clump with chin on hands, and peered over. To my disappointment nothing moved or showed itself. Above me—upstream—was the deep pool under the rotten old lock gate, and I thought once or twice that I could make out the waving tail of a monster fish, but agreed it was probably a shadow or a large water plant. While engaged in this speculation a mayfly appeared, circled round the pool, and then was carried over to the opposite side into the very narrow run that connected the two pools. I saw it going along and meant to watch it when it got slowly drifted down to the place between the two large bushes.

All of a sudden, up the narrow run, from the very place named, the form of a fine trout appeared, paused for a second—I thought because he had seen me—and then came on with a flash, took the mayfly, turned, and ran back to between the bushes.

Now it is all a question of distance. That I both estimated, and measured as nearly as was possible, making it at least twelve or thirteen yards. The mayfly was in a little trickle not nine inches deep nor two feet wide which extended for several yards below it. The trout was under the heavy bushes in the pool below. Yet he was obviously attracted by the movement of the fly, saw it, and made that special run right out into the shallow open lock to secure

it. He was a fish of a pound and a half, very dark and thick looking, judging from his form as he turned.

I remember thinking of sacrificing a loose mayfly, an artificial one, oiling it well and allowing it to float down the same channel; but the guilty look that the trout gave as he seized the real fly and bolted, made me think he would not be taken in. Instead of that, I spent the next hour in trying to get at his holt from below; holding on to willow bushes, that refused to support any weight, while attempting to feel a firm spot for the sole of one's foot. At last by persisting in this I managed to do one thing effectually, caught my fly in the top of the bush and after dragging at it, left just half the cast in the same place.

Below me, still among almost unapproachable mud and high rushes, there was another pool in which I thought I heard a rise, so after affixing a new length of gut and a fly, I threw on chance over the rushes and heard it taken by what was a lively trout of just under a pound, who again had to be hauled through mud and weeds in a degraded manner.

That same evening, and the two following ones, several fine fish were taken by other rods; one of two pounds and three quarters which I saw, as well as others which I did not. The really large trout rarely appeared to give anyone much chance until fully nine o'clock; so that the only plan of perhaps securing a brace is to take up a stand and remain immovable for half

an hour, which is rather trying, besides making one feel a bit of a poacher as it grows dusk.

One cannot pretend that trout caught when the fly cannot be seen, give much pleasure to the angler; excepting in the sense of mere possession. So long as one can see, not only the rise but also the fly after it has pitched, all is fair and above board in the matter of skill. Where the rise can be seen, and the fly cannot—which so often is the case in this evening fishing—the strike is a matter of guess work to a great extent, depriving the whole sport of its dry fly character.

The rule of 'an hour after sunset' is no doubt a good one; but I am too well aware that in many places it would spell a reprieve for each and all of the old cannibals that haunt the deep turns of many a river.

AUGUST ON THE ITCHEN.

A Difficult Month—The Bank to Oneself—Sedge Fly Stalking—The Keeper—The Best Trout of the Season.

> The day is dying. I shall see him die,
> And I shall watch the sunset, and the red
> Of all that splendour when the day is dead.
> And I shall see the stars upon the sky.
>
> ERIC MACKAY.

PESSIMISM must be kept far removed from anything to do with angling. Otherwise, I should be thinking of the cynical proverb quoted to me by a fly-fishing schoolmaster, 'God sends nuts to those who have no teeth to crack them.' He was answering the congratulation of some City men who envied him his three months' holiday a year. He wanted to exchange January for May—very naturally—and the first half of August for the first half of June. The three weeks at Easter, he conceded, were sometimes well timed; but cited, as a leaden lining to the silver cloud, that hotels were crowded and prices advanced, that full trains meant empty creels,

and that boys with their rat-sniffing terriers were too much in evidence along the river banks.

Now as regards the space of time occupied by the Public School summer holidays, I have always been on duty: having already by that date enjoyed to the full the long days of June and early July which are gilded by the midging trout of sultry afternoons, as well as by the true evening rise that plays the prelude to summer nights. Yet August week-ends have always kindly allowed many of us to snatch a fearful joy, when able to leave the City, in a fast train for Salisbury or Stockbridge after 3 p.m. on Friday afternoon, knowing that before six o'clock we can exchange our London clothes for the old flannel suit, as well as the grit of the baked pavement for the cool squelch of the water meadow.

No one who can enjoy this can truthfully deny the patent fact that his lines are cast in pleasant places. The walk to the station, at seven o'clock on a lovely morning with a brace of good trout ensconced in wet rushes, knowing that a few hours will again bring the pleasure of the westward journey in ample time for the evening fishing, is crowded not only with a general feeling of thankfulness, but also with the plans for the capture of the specimen trout which has for years past been before one's eyes.

The chaos again at Waterloo at two o'clock on an August Saturday, in the days of old 'Number one main line,' was in itself an

experience. A company of Territorials, and a batch of Swedish emigrants behind a barricade of luggage, a couple of frightened horses and a brace of coffins, were common objects of the platform. To book to Clapham and be carried to Winchester without a stop, after having escaped from a corridor boat train for Southampton, has befallen a belated traveller whose trustfulness in hurried porters has made him take his seat in a crowded carriage.

Almost everything has its compensation. Saturday evening, which brings such a turmoil even to Hampshire stations, draws nearly every-one away from the river bank. Luckily for anglers, people on holiday like each other's company better than the silence of the river side. They prefer the band to the bank, and the cinemas to the sedges. Consequently, by the time one passes through the village with rod and creel raincoat and landing net, after a peaceful tea at the cottage, and a desultory chat with the two patient mill pool anglers who fish with wasp grub, and who so often catch a two pounder only a few minutes after you leave them—which you hear about with chastened envy the following week—the prospect of the cool evening is everything that can be desired.

On the hatch stile are urchins, either running about in wet nudity or dressing hurriedly after their swim, each one telling the other how he—the other one—will catch it from his father or mother for being so late. Above them again

draggling home are more children, two little girls of eight and nine, each in charge of a diminutive brother, who has taken to their boots, carrying the pickle bottle known so well to minnows by a string round its neck. You watch them cross the slimy plank bridge; the river on one side; a ditch quite deep enough to drown all four on the other, if they chanced to trip on it.

Beyond that is the now deserted bank; the sun low in the heavens on the left, the terraced garden with its discordant peacocks on the right. Sedge flies are crawling about the rushes and fluttering between them. The surface of the stream is unbroken by any trout rise, though in certain shallows small grayling pop up at intervals. You are too abstracted, too magnanimous, or too magnificent to cast for them. Your plan is to move up to the peninsula under whose heavy fringe of rushes there were two trout this time last year whose places you know to a foot. Their time is not due for an hour or more, so you pass up, after depositing some of your kit on the rail of the plank bridge where you so well remember a sovereign dropping out of your pocket into the ditch as you stooped to pick a dock leaf.

The keeper comes down the meadow with his handsome setter, and sees you looking at the place. No, he never found it: although he had a try one winter's day. Perhaps one of the ditchers will years hence. There was no other rod out. The Captain he had ketched

a good trout last week, about a pound and three quarters—over there below the rhododendron bush. He had had his eye on him and tried all the previous evening, so was very pleased when he got him. Nothing was moving above, but it was early yet and promised to be a good evening. There was a good trout just below the lock, and ought to be there still on the far side just by the moorhen's nest.

There was another fine trout right down the water by the boat house—so the Captain had told him—but of course he might have got it and said nothing. The Captain didn't always show him his fish. He had sent the photograph you took of him to his married daughter in Toronto. No, she didn't like the place much: she had always lived on these meadows: she would give a year of her life, so she wrote to the missus, to walk up the river with him now and mind the hatches. But he was sixty five and his asthma troubled him a good bit now, so probably he would not be seeing her again. Well, it sounded a great country and her husband was getting on well but they never seemed to put nothing by. Yes, there were boys bathing above, but they would be gone soon he expected.

I can see the photo now, although it is mislaid, and wish I could reproduce it here; the kindly figure in gaiters who had never been photographed before in his life (he told me)

standing against a background of bullrushes with my rod in his hand. It is pleasant to think that he is still at his post, and will I trust remain there to the end of his days in the pretty cottage on the other bank of a side stream—the 'keeper's stream'—with its wicket gate leading over the wooden bridge. How long his vocation will last, how long the trout in the river will last, are thoughts that must not be allowed to cross one's mind.

The boys had left their bathing place before I crossed to the upper meadows, so I wandered down the peninsula to its extreme lower end until I came right over the moorhen's nest he had alluded to. Its eight hot eggs were almost pulsating with life, and the mother with expectancy, as she jerked about uneasily among the rushes. I moved twenty yards away to leave her in peace, faced upstream, and sat down on a tussock to light a pipe. There was a small open space between a tangled weed bed and the bank, in which a trout ought to be content to feed on sedge flies.

As there was nothing to be gained by walking about I might just as well wait for the mountain to come to Mahomet. The cinnamon sedge fly I had mounted was a pattern calculated to appeal to the most capricious appetite. I dared not even allow it to wave in the air lest a swift should take it, so it was impaled on a rush ready for immediate action.

Beyond the weed bed a rise occurred—a rise which said as plainly as facts can speak 'if you

throw for me you will be hitched up at the very first cast.' I did not do it but puffed away discontentedly. Another ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, and then patience was rewarded. In the deep run close under the bank there was a quiet rise. What was more it was repeated at quick intervals. It was beyond all doubt a trout that had just begun to feed.

My cast was made; it was taken down: it was taken further down as I struck—and there the situation ended. The line was firm and fast into something; but that something was itself equally firm and fast, well under an overhanging ridge of mud bank or rock, apparently wedged in. Nothing would stir it. The fly might as well have been in a sunken log as a sulky trout. Hand lining would not move it. A long rest did not alter matters. In spite of all the expedients tried the inevitable break came at last.

Another story of a lost three pounder. One's estimate, I notice, is in such cases always just fifty per cent. beyond one's best fish. He was an old campaigner no doubt and had his holt adorned like a wigwam with the relics of past escapes, artificial sedges and mayflies—perhaps even a contraband minnow—being the scalps he affixed to its walls. Trout such as these remind one of thieves who never move far from the alleys or courts up which they can escape the moment they have snatched a watch or purse. They do not intend to venture into the

open King's way: they know their business and their danger too well for that.

A three pounder—yes, perhaps he was a four pounder. All sorts of foolish thoughts are driven through your mind from sheer exasperation. Visions of the specimen trout of the river set up in a glass case over your office desk with your prowess and skill set out in pounds and ounces for friends to admire, doubt, or envy.

By the time I had growled over my bad management and sulkily affixed another sedge, I moved up the bank, saw the back fin of a large grayling appear in a shallow and refused to throw for it. To-night trout was my game. A good one might easily be got, though of course nothing approaching one half of that lost five pounder.

Above the shallow is another deep run under my own bank, so I knelt down where I could obtain a clear view of the twenty yard curve which had so often yielded up its monsters of the deep, determined to wait for something. All sorts of plans were laid as to how I would manage the next fish which was hooked. He should at least bring about the break in open water whatever happened. I would let him pull me in rather than give way a single inch.

After so long a pause that the water began to ooze through the grass over my knee pad the coveted moment came. A rise ahead, which must be crawled to carefully as there was very little cover. It was a curious rise, recurring at

short intervals, just as though an acorn had dropped into the water. It might of course be a tiny fish, though I did not think so. It might of course decline the sedge altogether. At any rate I warned myself not to make a mistake in the opposite extreme by pulling the fly out of his mouth before he had time to take it.

In spite of a state of breathless excitement the fly pitched fairly well: and, as it came over the place, disappeared. As I rose from my knees I struck firmly, held the line in my left hand and backed downstream. There was a splendid resistance, a case of rod *versus* fish which lasted for a few seconds. Then he moved away from the bank as though making for the weed-beds of mid stream. He had lost several yards in doing so. The bank was high but not overhanging. Below us was a channel of deep but open water into which he was free to dive and disport himself until exhausted. After a further struggle I caught sight of him and got the net out for action.

The first time I reached him the rim of the net only touched his middle. I was afraid of the bank giving way by venturing a foot closer. Each time the net touched him he dived down with his head upstream. Had he only behaved like a grayling and run down there was a weed bed below that could have spelt disaster to the gut. Three times he had the edge of the net nearly up to his gills, but he managed to slip over it. The fourth time he fell inside and the

next moment we were both in the meadow quivering with excitement.

I got out my spring balance. He ran the index to its full limit of two pounds and asked for more. Weighed later, on cold butcher's scales, he was two pounds two ounces and a fraction—the best trout of my season, much admired by myself on the bankside, by the *habitués* of the bar side where he was exhibited, as well as the next evening at the home supper table.

Well, sedge fly fishing is often like this. You may wander about the banks, spot various fish and capture two brace on an August evening. Or you may do the wandering without this result. Or, without any result. I have however always found it best to roam as little as possible after seven o'clock; but to choose a place which offers say a hundred yards of promising bank above you. Then take your stand—or your seat—at the lower end and slowly work it up. On good evenings the plan turns out well. If four fish are hooked, with only one lost, you have been dealt a fine hand. If three are hooked, with two lost, you have had good sport.

As already remarked, there is something very luxurious in finding yourself alone upon the water for three consecutive evenings. To know that a fish you have tried for, and failed to attract, will be in his place twenty four hours later, gives you a quickening step and an object in life as you near the place. One feels almost

inclined to say 'good evening' to a trout with whom you have been on terms of such intimacy. You have offered him your wares, while he on his part has given you the pleasure of his company, although accepting no favours.

It reminds you of dances where you looked out to see the same pretty girl in the room although you had not been introduced to her. It was enough to know she—or the trout—was there. An introduction, even an attachment, might come later on.

That the sedge fly is the only one to use on such occasions must not be supposed for a moment. A large Wickham or a Silver Twist will attract feeding trout often quite as well, sometimes indeed better. Very small flies on fine gut are frequently a mistake, even as regards rising the fish in fast moving water. There are times when they like a mouthful, or think they do, take it with considerable precision, and on a short line nearly hook themselves as they turn down.

Sedge flies ought to be the best as they imitate the real insect to a nicety. For some reason too they are usually mounted on stronger and better tempered hooks than other large flies, besides being well tied. I must own to a great preference for a pronounced side bend; indeed, from experience of disaster in the past, I do not care to fish with any other shaped iron.

Where trout are actually taking the flies off the rushes, as anglers have told me they have seen them do, it must be difficult to attract the

fish with an artificial. I have however on many an evening been successful by throwing right against the rushes, you can hear the rap it makes as it hits them and falls back on to the stream. In such places it is of course advisable to let the cast be made well above the fish. Do not necessarily take it off the water directly it has passed the rise, for trout will often follow it downstream. Large grayling in September do this still more. You can often see one with its nose against the fly until it catches sight of you watching the process.

On September afternoons it is as well to be upon the water soon after five o'clock; when, under shaded banks, good trout are well disposed to rise at small flies in preference to sedges. The most sparsely dressed hackle flies are quite as useful as winged patterns. Gray Quill gnat and Pale Watery Dun have been taken by many of my early September trout just after tea time, although I cannot pretend that they were the fly on the water. It all goes to show what chance or caprice governs the taste of a rising trout.

The modern experiments made by photographs from tanks under water will no doubt gradually effect changes in the tying of artificial flies. But even these experiments only show us what the fly looks like to human eyes. It cannot pretend to enlighten us as to how it looks to the fish. We have no conception of a fish's sense of colour—very little conception

of his perception of size. Nor again do we know whether he intends to swallow, as palatable food, everything which he takes into his mouth by rising at. It may be some pleasure to him to take hold of strange objects, just as it is a pleasure to a dog to snatch at an old bone, carry it a yard and drop it. He will do this again and again knowing quite well that it is of no use to him as food.

THE ANGLER'S BIRDS.

BIRDS OF THE ESTUARY—SUMMER MIGRANTS—WINTER VISITORS—AN OUTDOOR NATURALIST.

> E'en in the spring and playtime of the year
> That calls the unwonted villager abroad
> With all her little ones, a sportive train
> To gather kingcups in the yellow mead
> And prank their hair with daisies.
>
> COWPER.

AS it is almost impossible for anyone to take up trout fishing without noticing the birds that haunt rivers, swamps, and estuaries, I have transcribed the following notes relating to those which anyone may hope to see after a few seasons' observation, either during his summer sport with rod and creel, or his winter walks with dog and friend.

It need hardly be said that when speaking of birds'-nesting, one does not mean the robbing of nests. Any careful person, who wishes to take a specimen egg for a collection, naturally prides himself upon being able to do so without causing the bird to desert; while should he even want the nest itself he can wait until the parents have placed it in the agents' hands.

Some few birds an angler is not only certain to see, but is liable to catch. The swallow,

martin, sand martin, and swift will all take his fly as it blows out in the wind—a most distressing experience. In the case of the swift it is painful to both parties, for in holding the poor bird to release the hook he drives his sharp claws into the tender skin between your fingers until the pain is almost unbearable. Another experience, which it is pretty to watch and does no harm to the bird, is to see a swallow lift your mayfly off the surface, carry it just a yard, and drop it again. It may even have occurred to some angler that the fly was dropped in front of a good fish out of casting distance.

On some days the most familiar birds are the sandpiper, the water ousel, and the kingfisher. On others, the peewits circling over the meadows or the marshes. Perhaps the most ubiquitous of all is the moorhen; though not all anglers can pretend to be specially pleased with its company. Their sudden starting out of the rushes at your feet, with the totally unnecessary splashing and skurry of their flight across stream, leaves a wake of general disturbance and anathema. It most effectually puts down the fish you have been watching; besides causing a general uneasiness to all others within sight and hearing. Moorhens too are always deceiving one as to a real rise. You think the noise you heard, or the ring you saw, was a trout, whereas it has been caused by a moorhen suddenly diving. Where you cannot actually see the water under your

own bank, the 'plop' of a rat or a moorhen is annoyingly deceptive.

The Merlin.

For several years in succession, I have tried to discover a merlin's nest upon the heaths and moors of South East Devon, but have not as yet succeeded; although, from the persistent manner that two birds frequented one spot during the latter end of May, it is certain that their eggs could have been found by anyone able to devote time to watching them through good field glasses.

I found a nest once as a boy—or rather a stable lad named Jesse did, who was with me, and who was the arch bird's-nester of the holidays—at the edge of the Hermitage Wood, near Woking. He merely called it a little hawk, but I had no difficulty later on in identifying both nest and eggs as a merlin's. The eggs I have still, though rather faded from the rich red brown they were when freshly taken and blown. The merlin breeds far more freely in the north, the bird being by no means uncommon in Derbyshire; but during winter it is forced, like many others, to follow its food supply and migrate Southward even to the sea coast during severe weather.

Only a few years ago a friend showed me two birds which he had brought down with one shot, neither of which, he said, he had ever seen before. The one was a merlin, and the other a lesser spotted woodpecker. This was in

the second week of July. They were, he said, scuffling upon the ground on the East Devon Golf Course fully a quarter of a mile from any copse, so that the woodpecker must have been chased and flown down in the open.

In winter, the merlin can be counted as one of the rarer birds to be seen near the estuary. More than once I have come across its shambles or larder—a flat stone half way up the hillside, where odd feathers and bones bear evidence to the varied nature of its victims. It is a graceful little falcon, hardly to be mistaken for any other species if seen in near flight. On Woodbury Common, Black Hill, and the high ground between Sidmouth and Honiton, the sight of a merlin will often be one of the rewards of a morning's walk. The tail, when extended, has a broad dark bar at the end while the upper parts are not unlike a house-sparrow in colouring. All the under parts, the throat and belly, incline to creamy white.

The Marsh Harrier.

Among the really rare birds of the estuary and marshes, the Marsh Harrier may occasionally be seen usually towards evening; a large but sombre grey form, diligently beating over the ground in a methodical manner on the outlook for a young rat, moorhen, or even a frog. As I have only twice seen it—once so close within gunshot that it could not have been missed—the species is probably very uncommon excepting in the fens of East Anglia. A little

more drainage, with a little more pheasant preserving, and the Marsh Harrier in company with the bittern will exist only in museum cases.

The first time I saw the bird, he was sitting motionless on a small mound in an open part of the swamp. It was a dull forenoon with a suspicion of mist across the marshes. I took it at first to be a huge pigeon, but managed to get so close that its identification was certain, apart from the opinion of others who had seen the bird on previous occasions. As it rose, and beat away, it looked very large, its fan shaped tail being a distinguishing feature. It is very probable that a single pair of Marsh Harriers continue to frequent the estuary; and, I only hope, manage to breed there.

On the second occasion, I was walking up the ditches with a dog who was doing his best to turn something out of the rushes. Some distance behind him a large grey bird was beating along in his track, but it suddenly dropped to the ground behind a tall stack of dry rushes and never reappeared. I have no doubt it was my friend or his mate.

The Wagtails.

The Pied Wagtail.—Of the three species which are most commonly seen while fishing, the pied wagtail is almost too familiar to describe. Although migratory birds, they are found, at any rate in the South of England all the year round. As the wagtails are insect feeders they may be taken as a good

omen in the matter of fly upon the water; their hovering and undulatory flight across the stream often directing one's attention to a place where flies are playing round an overhanging willow, and where as a consequence a watchful trout is lying in wait below them.

The nest is not at all difficult to find being usually on the side of a bank, or an ivy-clad wall to a cart shed, or against a hay rick; containing four or five eggs of an opaque white finely speckled with pale grey or greeny brown. If, on looking out of the inn window on an April morning, the familiar pair of wagtails are hawking at flies in the road, you may expect a good day. If on the other hand you see them drop into the small dyke that skirts the garden, and paddle among the gravel and stones, do not be surprised at a blank forenoon.

THE GREY WAGTAIL.—Some confusion often arises over the name chosen for this bird whose dominant colouring on all the under parts of the body is a pronounced, but not a bright, yellow. The term *Sulphurea* so well expresses it, that the Sulphur Wagtail would be a far easier term of recognition.

Although a partial migrant the Grey Wagtail is to be found on trout streams all the year round, more particularly in the winter and spring. Indeed the Grey Wagtail and the Dipper are usually the two first birds to greet you in March, as you stand on the bridge and take your rod from its case, the one dropping

you a feminine curtsey and the other bobbing a bachelor bow.

This species is the most truly aquatic of the three, seldom leaving the immediate vicinity of the water, which it crosses and recrosses with the same joyous and jerky flight. Not only will they wade out freely in the shallows looking for minnows, but will move about like yellow mice on floating masses of weed and rubbish where they can only obtain an insecure foothold.

In Devonshire I have not come across the nest, although I know a certain ledge teeming with primroses, on the other side, where a pair build every year. It is too deep to wade across and too far round to prompt the walk in early spring. On the banks of the Itchen a young fellow who used to walk up the river with me found several, both in May and June, which shows that two broods must often be hatched out. These nests were invariably among the tangled herbage on the steep bank and could not possibly have been mistaken for those of either the pied or the yellow wagtail. Besides which the birds themselves were in constant evidence, feeding busily on the small islands of cut weed that floated downstream day after day. The eggs number five or six; whitish, clouded and mottled with olive colour.

THE YELLOW WAGTAIL.—This is Ray's Wagtail, as he is properly termed, quite unmistakable from the preceding bird when once both of

them have been seen, being from throat to the under part of the tail a brilliant canary yellow. Apart from this it is altogether more delicately formed having somewhat the appearance of a yellow swallow or martin ill fitted for any north wind or rigorous frost.

It is a summer visitant; arriving in Devon towards the middle of April and departing in September. They are far less dependent upon streams, or indeed upon water of any kind for obtaining their food supply, than the Grey Wagtail. So far as I have noticed they are usually attendant upon cattle, running backwards and forwards with a great many unnecessary airs and graces, every now and then stopping to let their tails nearly wag them off their legs, as they hawk the insects that surround fat and lazy cows. In 'Yarrell's British Birds,' the yellow wagtail is stated to be pretty numerous in summer; and, with the exception of Devonshire and Cornwall, to be found in suitable places throughout England. Yet it is in Devonshire that I chiefly associate the birds on the meadows on hot June and July afternoons, which shows how the partial migration of birds changes according to certain seasons. As a matter of fact for the last few summers they have not been in the meadows referred to. I cannot remember ever having seen the three species actually together, although it must often occur.

The nest of the yellow wagtail is always upon the ground, and usually softly lined. It

contains four to six eggs of a gray white colour very closely mottled with brown and olive green, and occasionally streaked at the thick end after the manner of a yellow hammer's. Two broods are reared as a rule.

The Water Rail.

A long, wet, wounded bird trying to escape up a ditch, is the impression given by the first sight of a water rail. Even if a stone manages to induce him to rise as he is slipping through the rushes, he still does so in a bedraggled manner, with legs hanging down, taking the first opportunity of dropping into cover. You may drive one under a long low cattle bridge which crosses a boggy dyke, but if you have no dog with you, it will never come out the other side. On the water too he will plop under the surface as soon as he sees you—generally before you have seen him—and apparently never come up again. If there is anything in sexual selection, it seems difficult to account for a water rail ever attracting a mate. He has the demeanour of an unsuccessful felon with the plumage of an unfashionable dowdy.

The Water Rail is an all the year resident on the estuary, skulking about the marshes at all times and seasons; seldom seen, and seldom molested. Its nest, like itself, is inconspicuous besides being very well concealed, a loose bulky structure composed of all the surrounding rubbish; placed just where foothold on the ooze-

bank is treacherous and evil smelling, and is additionally protected by an overhanging tussock of grass or rush—just the place in fact which one would pass by. The eggs are smaller than a moorhen's, in number six or seven, the colouring being almost identical, buff white, speckled with darker brown or mauve. As nests with fresh eggs can be found in June it is probable that two broods are reared in the season.

At the end of May, a few years back, I came across a mother with her young chicks on the lower Itchen among some rushes in a shallow embayment. In her desperate hurry to collect them all and escape observation, one was left behind, a little fluffy black urchin, which took a wrong turning and struck out into the current, cheeping dolefully. The mother made a half turn towards it, but catching sight of me, retreated after her family leaving the straggler to its fate.

Once in the swift current it could do nothing, so I got the landing net and ran down the bank meaning to intercept it at the next bend; but, unluckily, it had sufficient strength and sense to paddle away just out of reach as the net made a sweep for it. As I watched it carried away I wondered whether a Jack would take it, but the keeper afterwards said a rat probably swam out and seized it within the first hundred yards.

In adult plumage the water rail is a dull bird, its back a decayed brown and its under

parts a muddy grey, both blending exactly with the rotted rushes above and the bare swamp beneath. It must furnish poor sport with a gun and cannot be very appetising at table. Altogether it is a depressing and low spirited bird, given to freakish flights in the dark just when the solitary angler is picking his way home between the sleeping cattle on the path and the iris clumps at the river bank. These circular flights both of water rails, and coots, can be for nothing but exercise, as they never appear to leave the swamp.

THE LITTLE GREBE.—Imagine what our life would be like, if a Krakatoa eruption, a Naini-tal landslip, a San Francisco earthquake, or a fire of Chicago, were weekly occurrences or contingencies. Yet the daily life of a Little Grebe (or Dabchick) may offer any of these diversions. A weed-cutting machine may tear its home up by the roots, or a flood carry it down through a hatch hole; to say nothing of the hourly terrors of dogs, pike, hen-harriers or water rats.

The desperate and self sacrificing courage of this bird, displayed at any moment, puts all human exploits of bravery in the shade. To pause when flushed by a spaniel, gather four tiny chicks under its wings, and then dive off the nest with them, is as ordinary an action as a man stepping aside to avoid a motor car.

The normal existence of half the animal world appears to be sudden death or starvation with interludes of the keenest enjoyment.

Early in May the nest of the dabchick can be found on almost any of the lagoons and ponds that occur in the marshes. It is a loosely compiled structure generally formed on a floating island of weeds and rushes, constructed so as to rise and fall with the water level, while moored sufficiently well to keep its place in the current. As however it chooses backwaters in a river there is seldom much danger of the nest being carried away. The bird while sitting always manages to slip off the nest into the water without splash if disturbed, after covering its eggs with weed. To such a pitch of perfection has modern observation been brought that I saw the whole process of a mother feeding its young, on a cinematograph in London, far better than any ordinary observer could succeed in doing by the waterside with Zeiss glasses. A second brood is hatched out as a rule, for I have seen the little chicks in Hampshire in August on more than one season. They can swim as soon as they are a day old, their education in diving being complete perhaps a week later.

RIVERS AND HOTEL FISHINGS.

THE COQUET, NORTHUMBERLAND—EGGESFORD—NORTH AND SOUTH DEVON—DULVERTON—EXMOUTH—SPRING FISHING—WEATHER AND HOLIDAYS.

And meet your warmest welcome at an inn.
POPE.

FOR those who care for the experience of others when it is at any rate disinterested, and without the object of advertisement, I should like to mention a few rivers and fishings that have come either within my own practical knowledge, or of which I can speak from the letters and accounts of accurate angling friends. It does not in the least follow that anything named here is better than others which are not. It merely means that the others are less well known to me.

To begin with a very northern river, the Coquet can justly claim attention, and can be

coupled with the name of the County Hotel, Rothbury, Northumberland. The charms of the Coquet has impelled several local bards to write verses in its praise, while as for the trout their colouring must be difficult to match from other rivers.

The Coquet rises in the Cheviots between Northumberland and Roxburgh, its course being for the most part eastward. Of its tributaries, the Usway and the Alwine may be mentioned, while at Thropton it is joined by the Wreigh. No one can do better than peruse the short account of the Coquet in the small pamphlet issued by the Northumberland Anglers' Federation. In that, they tell us, the river is most carefully watched, 'the poacher deterred and the true angler encouraged.' Would that this could be said of scores of other good fishings.

Permits are issued at almost a nominal charge by the Coquet Committee of the Anglers' Federation, so that it is possible to take one out for a day, a week, or a month. The trout season extends from 4th March to the 30th September. Monthly tickets cost ten shillings; weekly, seven and sixpence; and daily, half a crown. At the County Hotel, Rothbury, the fishing is free to visitors. Mr. Garvin the manager writes to me under date of January 18th this year (1912), that the largest yellow trout he has seen captured was 6¼ lbs. caught by Mr. Benbow of Edinburgh in August, 1910. As a rule in April good baskets of from two to three dozen are secured, but this last season

(1911) there were several catches of between three and four dozen.

To jump a matter of four hundred miles—which is nothing to a really enthusiastic angler with a sufficient length of holiday—I should like to name the Fox and Hounds Hotel at Eggesford, North Devon; where the proprietor has some fifteen miles of good trout fishing. The size limit is eight inches, and the number limit two dozen a day. Wading is not necessary but is an advantage. The season opens from 1 March to 30 September and fishing is free to all the hotel visitors. The terms of the hotel are three guineas a week.

In a letter this year, as to recent doings, the proprietor Mr. Littleworth gives me the following extract from his visitors book of last season (1911). 'March 28th 20 trout weighing nine pounds; March 29th 20; March 30th 10; April 3rd 9; 8th 8; 12th 6; 15th 4; 17th 7; 18th 5; 19th 13; 21st 6; 22nd 13; 24th 8; 26th 18 (weighing nine pounds) and April 28th 12;—a total of 206; the heaviest fish being fourteen ounces, with several of a full twelve ounces.

Of the Axe in Devonshire, and the Dove in Derbyshire, I have already spoken.

On the River Otter, South Devon fishing can be obtained either by staying at the Imperial Hotel, Exmouth, or the Rolle Arms Hotel, Budleigh-Salterton. A limited number of Day Tickets, which are not transferable, are issued from the Rolle Estate Office, Exmouth,

by Mr. E. Chamier. These were, for last season, six shillings between mid-March and mid-May; or three shillings afterwards, until the close of the season on 31st August. The conditions cited are, that Artificial fly only is to be used; that no fish under nine inches is to be killed, or more than one dozen to be kept; and that no wading is allowed.

During the past ten years the average size of trout on this river has been seven ounces, taking the whole year round. Of course during the summer months individual catches have far exceeded this; having often approximated three quarters of a pound, while in nearly every season a specimen trout of about two pounds has been taken by some fortunate rod.

On other early Devonshire rivers the Carnarvon Arms Hotel at Dulverton can be recommended, where five miles of preserved water on the Exe and Barle are open to the hotel visitors.

With the full list of Anglers' Hotels and Fishing quarters described or advertised each week in the *Fishing Gazette* there can never be any real difficulty of where to go, provided one has the necessary time and keenness when one's holiday comes round.

Something may be said upon the question of expense: for it is no use pretending that fishing is every man's sport; or that everyone can afford a three guinea weekly bill at a hotel, in addition to the cost of a long journey. In naming the hotel bill and railway ticket, one

can claim at least to have named almost all. The temptation to spend money on side issues is removed. There is no pier, no concert hall, no cinema palace, often indeed no billiard room.

The holiday angler therefore, unlike the visitor at a fashionable seaside resort, should be able to work to the strictly moderate estimate he put down, for contingencies, before starting. Whether the river he fishes in is good or bad, whether the days are cold or kind, whether his hand is 'in' or not, whether his health at the time is normal or below par, the man who returns from a fly fishing holiday to the City generally does so with his head full of the improved plans he will elaborate for his next holiday. Nothing is quite like it. Nothing is so restful. Nothing is so exciting. Nothing so delightful to look forward to—or to look back upon. Of course a distinct pull that the fly fisherman has is his indifference to wet weather. During the whole of a drizzly spring, when hardly a day passes that can be termed anything but doubtful, we are as happy as the cattle, provided the river is not in flood. When the tennis court or the cricket pitch is sodden, the water is often in its finest condition, and trout in their most generous mood.

Devonshire rivers with gravelly beds are often most favourable for wet fly fishing, during March and April, when the water is beer coloured. On such days between ten o'clock and three I have seen many takes of twenty trout, averaging a full seven ounces; which

means that a basket contains a few of three quarters of a pound. I have caught a full pounder on the opening day (March 4). Generally the result of early downstream fishing is that one catches a fair proportion of fish but little over the nine inch limit—fish if weighed will often be found to be barely five ounces.

How one can manage at such a time to select one's trout so as to obtain a good average weight in pure downstream angling is a problem that others must solve. Only this last season as I looked at my dozen fish—three having been put back which were oversize in order to allow of three better ones being taken —I could see that they averaged between six and seven ounces, and were fully up to the usual run of catches made at this season in many former years. The next morning I met two other strange rods, whom I had seen fishing the same water. I answered the usual questions as to number and commented on the small size of March trout. Neither of them agreed to this. The first man had got his dozen 'and they weighed ten pounds at the hotel last night.' 'Did you put back many?' I asked. 'No, only three or four.'

A little bit later, on thinking this over, I saw the other man who had caught seven. 'Your friend's catch was very good: was it twelve fish weighing ten pounds?' 'Yes, that's right, we weighed them at the hotel last evening, a full ten pounds.' 'Well, that is a record

for this river, I have known it for fifteen years and never seen such a basket.' 'Ah, very likely' he replied 'my friend is a splendid fisherman.'

The river the preceding day was full and highly coloured. I myself had seen both men fishing downstream, apparently with three flies; casting them out in the orthodox March manner, and allowing them to come round under one's own bank, then stepping forward a pace and repeating the process. How the art of being a splendid fisherman preserved those flies from being taken by the five and six ounce trout, which had so readily come to mine, is beyond any theory I can advance. But the two men had seen the fish weighed at the hotel. Mine I never thought of weighing, but would have bet a sovereign they did not exceed five pounds. Here then is one of the disappointments one has to put up with, to find all records of a river, even its summer records, broken in early March by a comparative stranger to the water.

At Easter last year a friend who owns perhaps the best mile of the river saw 'four fish caught in one day each one over a pound' taken by perhaps the best known angler—either wet or dry—in Devonshire. The same rod, later in the year, 'caught twelve averaging nearly three quarters of a pound in July.' The largest trout caught on his water to his knowledge was 2 lbs. 2½ oz.

CHOICE OF FLY.

LEGENDARY FAVOURITES—A FISHERMAN'S FETISH —THE BLACK GNAT—ADVENTURE WITH AN ALEXANDRA.

> What is there they will not choose?
> If only you will but oppose their choice.
>
> BYRON.

REMEMBERING in the early days of fly fishing how exercised I was over this subject, I had intended tabulating month by month a list of flies recommended for use. This however seems to me quite unnecessary and probably confusing.

In the first place such a list could not but read as an evident crib from other far better books, as well as from the excellent coloured catalogues of Messrs. Hardy Brothers and other first rate tackle makers. Nor has my experience of rivers been sufficiently diverse to attempt to lay down any law upon so wide a subject.

With some men a particular fly is a fetish.

They have found it prove a charm on days when their catch headed the list of Hotel takings; so that no amount of subsequent failure can displace the memory of those triumphs. With other men a fly is a legend. They have been told by friends that it is the fly to use in certain months. They therefore continue year after year to 'put it up,' assuring themselves that if the fish will not take this they will take no other.

There is all the vexed controversy of colour, of size, of wings or hackle, of gut flies or eyed flies, of turned up eyes and turned down eyes, of patterns which are best fished wet or fished dry; so that the subject becomes altogether too involved to be useful to a beginner. He should listen very little to anything dogmatic; which, even if correct, may be applicable to other rivers, and not to the one he is fishing. After his very first season the beginner must learn by experience; not being in the least ashamed to try any fly which he thinks may tempt either trout or grayling.

Then again it is impossible, when mentioning a particular fly by name, to convey much idea of its appearance unless dressed in the same way all over the country. If different dressings of certain flies bear the same relation to the parent type that the varieties of pigeons do to the wild Rock pigeon, then it is no wonder that anglers understand something quite different from each other, when they recommend a particular species of artificial fly for use on a

certain river. However, I must not drift into a Darwinian theory on the evolution of fly tying: but will quote a paragraph from a friend's letter to whom I applied for assistance.

He replied, 'to speak of Silver Twist or Blue Upright conveys no meaning to the angling mind, elementary or advanced, because flies called by these names are dressed in such different ways. The Dun which the 'blue upright' is supposed to imitate, is very dark in February; so the so called scientific ones dress the artificial lure with a dark, almost black, hackle. Towards March and April the same natural insect gets paler and browner, and is eventually imitated by the fly we know as the 'Red Upright'; and so on. Therefore, unless the dressings of each pattern are carefully given, the scientific fisher is not enlightened any more than the ignorant novice.'

From another letter I quote the following: 'my plan about advising beginners on the question of flies, is to tell them to go to a reliable local tackle maker, in the absence of a competent friend on the spot to advise them, and to take his selections. Thus for Devonshire streams, such as the Exe, Dart, Teign, Otter, Axe, Taw and Torridge, good flies, suitable for the different months, may be had from any of the leading tackle shops in Exeter, Barnstaple, or Torrington; if he is not satisfied with the coloured catalogues. I always advise hackle flies for wet fishing in the early months, February, March or April; and will name as

my favourites February Red; Blue Upright (male and female), Half Stone, Hare's Flax, Middle Blue, Silver Twist, and of course March Brown, without which no beginner thinks he is complete.'

'I think the sizes of the patterns should be according to the weather and water: on a coarse windy day with heavy water a large pattern; for a fine day with low and clear water, a small pattern. This ought to be quite enough for a beginner to start with. One can only give the flies which you found to be 'good medicine' when you were a tyro.'

In wet fly fishing it is important to choose a hackle fly which does not resolve itself into the shape of a wet camel's hair paint brush—unless you find that it 'takes' in that form. The hackle of a fly is of course intended to imitate the legs of the real insect, especially those of a drowned one. It is advisable therefore to look at your fly as it lies in the water and see the kind of resemblance it bears to what it is posing as a counterpart. You will not trouble to do this if it is attracting fish. So long as the fly is successful, pay no attention to its shape—not even if part of the dressing has come away. As to a winged sedge fly, or an alder, it is frequently most killing when half the wing is hanging off or half the hackle so untwisted that it presents the appearance of two flies. Even a badly rusted iron is no drawback, provided the point and barb are effective.

The first really nice trout I ever caught came to a Greenwell's Glory. I have its tracing now on two sheets of note paper, thirteen inches, and thirteen ounces. As, before that auspicious evening my record trout was under seven, and was hooked foul, the joy of this monster can be imagined. Every enthusiastic angler has felt the same. Those who have yet to experience this pleasure are to be envied also. The successful strike, the dreaded strain on the line and rod, as the fish gets down the stickle on a long line, the terror of his escape, the momentary sinking of heart when you believe he has done so, the clumsy winding up of the reel, the jumping among the stones of the huge form, the breathless dives made at it with the net as it got into another pool, where at last it was dipped out; all these form the links in the chain of intense pleasure which culminates—at that period of one's fishing experience—in the possession of the thick and slippery prize that hitherto had only been seen in other men's baskets.

A fly I have personally never done good with is the March Brown. Indeed I have got to regard it as one of the legendary favourites; though, being when well dressed, a most accurate imitation of the real fly upon the water, there is no doubt as to its efficiency. On early rivers a 'Blue Upright,' rather sparsely dressed with hackle the colour of a Dipper's back, a sooty brown, retains my faith for hours together. I have some with a distinctly yellow

body, to which I can get no two anglers to put the same name, that appeal to me, and my favourite runs or pools, better than any other patterns. 'It is a kind of Blue Upright I suppose.' 'It certainly is not a Blue Upright.' 'It looks a likely fly any way.' These are the varying verdicts of its species, or variety, given by different friends on the meadows. Of late years I have had it made to pattern, from sheer inability to define it.

As May progresses towards the fifteenth of the month, the Black gnat, in various shapes and sizes, must be in the angler's fly box. The very prettiest form of dry fly fishing is generally enjoyed with this neat little lure. To hook and land a pound-and-a-halfer on a nought-nought black gnat, from a well whipped Club water, brings the same satisfaction as a stroke at billiards, which, under no circumstances, would be regarded as a fluke even by the bitterest opponent. How some of these tiny hooks manage to hold a trout, whose maw could compass a tangerine orange, is a marvel. Yet they do, most effectively, burying themselves in some tough piece of sinewy or bony substance often far down the fish's gullet.

Another much vaunted fly—one which is barred on certain waters as being hardly a fair one to use, is the Alexandra. On its silver shanked hook surrounded with peacock's harl it must gain its efficacy from being mistaken for a minnow as it is drawn through the water. One proof of this exists in the fact that large

Alexandras are made with a small metal spinner at their head, a pattern which, under no method of sportsmanlike argument, can be fairly reckoned as an artificial fly.

My own success with an Alexandra was confined to one memorable evening fifteen years ago. Having heard it said that 'the fly ought to be barred,' I naturally determined to obtain one. It was all done in such secrecy that I wrote up to Town for the samples; and kept the envelope containing them as carefully as a rouleau of notes, almost next to my skin.

I laid plans not only for the day, but also for the very pool and hour, arranging to sleep at an inn so as to be able to stay out until ten o'clock. The place was known as the Elbow pool, the river making a sharp and deep turn under the red cliff just there. During the evening rise, although the yellow snouts popped up in the broken water of the run above it, I only managed to hook four, none of them being over nine ounce fish.

At 9.30 the rise ceased: so now was the time for the fateful Alexandra. It had already been affixed to a new two yard cast which lay coiled in damp blotting paper, like a deadly snake, ready for action. The pool had a steep stony beach on two sides of it, while against the cliff was an enormous blackberry bush touching the water.

After casting straight down stream three or four times, in the manner of the ordinary duffer, I was just reeling it up when it was

seized. I had wound up the line quite short, so could see that the fish was very close to my feet. I gripped the line firmly to the rod, resisting the most determined tugs. It felt exactly the same as a large pollack on a sea line. The next minute he came to the top, giving a heavy jump that just showed me his full outline in the dusk—quite the largest trout I had ever seen.

The tugs grew so vigorous that I thought I ought to give him a little line to save a break: so doled out a few yards grudgingly, assuming of course that he would use them to take down to the bottom of the pool. But no: he did not. To my horror I found that he had just slipped to the side and was well up under the overhanging blackberry bush. Never had I dreamed of such treachery. You must guess the rest.

The break occurred, leaving the Alexandra and a foot of strong gut in his bony jaw, and leaving me with the rest of the tackle. How near the whole of that followed him into the pool I will not say. He was the size of a three pound pollack. Nothing will now persuade me that he was less than two and a half.

It is no use piling up the agony of rage and disappointment. I had bungled him grievously. One more half minute of struggle on that short line would have finished him. I should have dipped out the prize of the season: taken, too, precisely in accordance with

the plan. The loss of that trout cast a gloom on my fishing mind for years: partly because I felt no one would realise his size—partly because I did not like to tell the full story of the Alexandra. So I do now, for any beginner it may interest.

BIRDS OF THE ESTUARY.

THE DUCKS IN WINTER—WIGEON—TEAL—THE BITTERN—RARER BIRDS.

DURING a really hard winter, such as we have not had for the past dozen years, the estuary and flats are alive with many kinds of duck; they being of course driven to the coast, or the brackish water, owing to the freezing of their inland meres and marshes.

Dr. C. Butler, of Syon House, East Budleigh, has shot Pintail duck and grey goose, in addition to the regular winter visitants such as wigeon, teal, and mallard. I have myself seen shelduck and Pochard. A pair of Tufted Duck were also shot a few years back: while Mr. C. Crier obtained a fine pair of Hooded Merganser—perhaps one of the rarest birds to be seen on the estuary.

The mallard, or wild duck, is of course distributed all over the country; remaining here to breed, although the nest is by no means confined either to river banks or to the

immediate vicinity of water. On long country walks through coombes or dingles, the nest may be found alongside any small swamp or marshy bottom; a straggling structure, softly lined, containing perhaps ten eggs, which have been carefully covered by the mother before she slipped off them on your approach.

The sight of wild duck has so far been the only reward I ever reaped from getting up at daylight in June in order to fish. On the three different occasions that I tried this experiment, I never caught a single trout, though on the bank side at half past three; but each time I put up wild duck, twice well within range.

On many winter mornings, provided the marsh and estuary have not been much troubled by guns, wigeon can be seen along the margins of the ponds, usually well out of gunshot. They are so wary that it is only now and then that a brace are bagged after much careful stalking. The wigeon does not breed here but makes off north in the spring as far as the arctic circle.

Teal are far more common on these ponds, though they too are very shy at anyone who might be carrying a gun. In looking at the ponds from a quarter of a mile away it is difficult always to tell teal from moorhens, but after watching for a short time, you may see one dive, which settles the question for you, as teal never dive when feeding—in fact never at all unless when wounded. I have never found their nest either upon or near the

marshes, but it is extremely probable that they remain to breed in the locality.

Among uncommon birds, it is pleasant to know that the bittern can occasionally be included. Dr. Butler has a fine specimen stuffed and set up, which he obtained on the marshes, and writes under date of January 22nd, 1912, 'on referring to my game book I find my bittern was shot on January 13th, 1909. There seems to have been a cold snap of weather at the time.' It may be some time before another example either of the bittern or the marsh harrier are seen; although observers with glasses are more common now than five years ago.

Speaking of disappearing birds prompts one to notice those which are becoming more familiar. Two which can be cited are the Reed Warbler and the Sedge Warbler. During the past summer or two I have located many nests of each species in a swamp which I will not particularise. In the case of the Reed warbler this place has only been occupied lately, so that I hope to find them again next season. The nest is quite unmistakable being suspended between reed stalks or willow branches.

Every angler can hear the sedge warbler as late as ten o'clock; so much so that in Devonshire its song at that time probably accounts for rumours of nightingales. But I never knew any person thoroughly familiar with the nightingales' notes who could make such a mistake.

I quote the following brief lines pencilled for me by Alderman C. E. L. Gardner, J.P., of Clifton who has a residence near the estuary and who, in addition to the finest powers of observation with field glasses, has acquired a reputation as an outdoor naturalist superior to that of many scientific ornithologists.

'A few years ago on an August bank holiday I found my first Ringed plovers' nest at Budleigh-Salterton. I noticed the bird creeping up over the beach and settle down. On going over to the place I found the nest with one egg. I say nest, but there was really none, as the egg was on the stones. Unfortunately the place was crowded with people and the egg was either stepped upon or taken: although I believe the Herring gulls are the worst enemy the Ringed plovers have.

I have since found a number of nests—the earliest date May 17th—and watched many rear their young ones in safety. Occasionally the bird selects a patch of tide refuse for its nesting spot; but usually I have found the eggs on the bare beach. Although a heavy pebble beach and very extensive, yet I once found the eggs in precisely the same place two years following, as proved by a peculiar stone by which I marked the spot.

This reminds me that I once found a Butcher bird's nest (Red backed shrike) three years following in the same bush. The first one contained five eggs on June 2nd—the next year on May 27th. On the first occasion after

the young birds had flown I removed the nest, and finding the birds built again the second year I again removed it. In the third year, for some reason, the birds deserted nest and egg; and never came back to the same tree.

I had an unusual experience (April 19th, 1911) with a Golden Crested wren. Seeing a nest which I could not reach I got a boy to climb up. He brought me down one egg although he had broken another in the nest which he said contained a lot. I naturally concluded that the birds would desert, so a week afterwards thought I would secure the nest for the Bristol Museum, but strange to say found eight eggs in perfect condition, the old birds evidently having removed the broken egg. Near by I have found both Chiffchaff and Willow Wren's nests.

A pair of Shelducks usually build near the estuary although I have never located the nest. Two years following I found a Kestrel's nest in the cliff by the river side, also several King fishers' and dippers'.

Among the birds I have seen are Land rail and water rail, once a pair of Eider ducks, Great Northern Diver, Oyster catcher, Redshank, Dunlin, Tern, Puffin and Curlew. Of the latter, twice a pair built at the bottom of the railway bank near the marsh, but I only discovered them as the young ones were clearing off. On the common one of my little ones called out, and I found a Nightjar showing fight: on my coming up it flew off leaving a

slight nest and two eggs. In Otterton Park besides many woodpeckers' I have found one nest of the Ring ousel.

Unfortunately too many people have discovered that the Ringed plovers nest upon the beach; and take the eggs. Consequently, the birds have left the locality. Last year I counted a large flock, about eighty, in the spring; and yet there was not a single nest this year. I hear the same applies to Exmouth warren. Years ago there were dozens of nests, now only one or two.

In 1909 I located during the season a total of 156 birds' nests containing in all 416 eggs, and 103 young birds: in 1910 133 nests, with 373 eggs and 131 young; and in 1911 197 nests, 440 eggs and 170 young birds.'

THE GRAYLING.

(*Salmo thymallus*).

The Autumn Grayling.

There is in woods a solemn sound
Of hollow warnings whispered round.
.....
Shuddering Autumn stops to list,
And breathes his fear in sudden sighs,
With clouded face, and hazel eyes
That quench themselves and hide in mist.
Yes, Summer's gone like pageant bright,
Its glorious days of golden light
Are gone—the mimic suns that quiver,
Then melt in Time's dark flowing river.

HOOD.

ONE of the nicest traits we know about grayling is that they require purer water than trout. Where drainage and dye works are reduced to a minimum, as in the hill streams of Derbyshire or Yorkshire, or the old world alluvial pasturages of Hants, one finds the grayling in full vigour.

In the Hampshire waters especially they lie in open pools, where they can be detected like pale mauve green shadows against the mauve, grey chalk deposit. Often they consort together in some dozens, so that were they elephants they could be grouped into herds rather than shoals.

When water has run low owing to a mill stream diversion or the opening of flooding

hatches on a Sunday in September, really magnificent grayling are occasionally seen—a Cabinet Council as it were, all of two and three pounders; eight or ten lying sulkily within a few yards of each other in a pool the size of a board-room. Needless to say, they will no more rise on such an occasion than a politician challenged by the opposite party. The water is not to their liking in current or volume; and they either avoid weed cover, or are in reality sifting some form of food off the chalky mud. If watched through opera glasses they appear to have a constant swaying motion, or parallax, within a foot circle while keeping station like a fleet of battleships at anchor.

Walk up to another part of the same river and there, in a sparkling run or a swiftly moving shallow, small fish—maiden grayling—of from seven to ten ounces will be found rising freely; so much so that, as a species of pretty practice, one can keep on throwing for them with the left hand for an hour at a time, rising dozens and perhaps only hooking three or four.

There is this difference between trout and grayling in the matter of surface food—that a trout far more means business as a rule. His rise is either hunger or savageness. He is the dog with the bone. The grayling is the kitten with the cork.

Then again, the trout appreciates the old fashioned solid imitations of the natural fly.

They are to him as the pabulum of beer and whisky to the average man. The grayling is the girl at the restaurant. She is to be tempted with sauterne or constantia, pink noyeau or green chartreuse. The trout is the man attracted by tweed in the roll: the grayling the *debutante* whose head is turned—very literally—by the tinsel and feathers of the hat shop.

Trout will rise or sulk; and if really well put down, as by the constant thrashing of the water above them by a persistent duffer, are no more likely to come to his fly than they are to creep into his creel. Grayling on the other hand are capricious, and it is always worth remembering that if once a fish has risen to you you may find it successful to make another fifty casts, or to change your fly five times.

A grayling which has once done you the favour of rising to your fly is more likely to do so again than other untried ones you may see lying in the deeps or shallows.

Usually their annoying plan is to pay no attention to really well presented flies; small duns or olives coming down the water like gossamer, indeed almost preening their dry wings as they are wafted along. These, the grayling will let go by, and will continue to shoot up to the surface and pretend to take something else that is not there, and that she knows is not there. After you have exhausted your niceties and compliments, have risen from

your knees, and have executed a clumsy cast that made a cart whip ripple through your own shadow, she will come and take that fly on the drag as though it had been previously invisible, will hook herself without a strike on a semi-slack line, will come through or over the weeds like a girl after an actor, and literally throw herself at your feet.

Of grayling taken out of season I have nothing to say. It is done persistently, and those to whom it appeals as sport must continue to practise it. The reputation of the grayling has suffered immensely by its being hooked played and landed during the may-fly season. That is when so many of the two and three pounders are 'captured.' A dusk June evening —a large spent gnat—and tackle strong enough to cut weeds with.

We will not insult the sex by repeating judgments given in May and June, any more than one would gauge a season's beauties by their appearance when approaching their bathing machines after a long swim attired in hired dresses. A person publishing a snap shot made on such an occasion deserves to have his pleasures curtailed. It brings its own punishment in loss of appreciation for what is sporting and beautiful.

Let grayling fishing be reckoned with partridge shooting and its real pleasures, actual and sentimental, are doubled immediately.

For my own part, September has been the only month—indeed in Hampshire only the

first fortnight of September—when trout and grayling are in together. Even on August evenings, when sedge-fly fishing becomes so attractive, it is far better to keep to trout: to make no cast at any rise which you know to be a grayling's. By thus giving her the very fairest play she will give you the very fairest sport. She will jump out of water for you when struck, in a manner utterly beyond her power in April or May, when taken by accident on trout tackle. Grayling fishing *par excellence* dates from the time when trout is finally barred—after 30th September.

Anglers who honestly cannot afford, cannot get access to, or cannot get away early enough in the year to take up or keep up trout fishing, may look forward keenly to their opening day in October, when they first visit a river on which they have acquired the right to fish. As schoolmasters know, the weather in October is sometimes perfect; and during every day there is a full hour as a rule during which grayling are taking surface food in a thoroughly meaning manner. Therefore it is necessary to keep on the water from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., if one wants to miss nothing. I have generally had my best baskets after an early tea: that is to say I have found the deadest part of the day to be between half past two and four, so have acted in accordance.

Excepting with the dry fly, my practical experience is nil. The wet fly lure may be far more successful.

On this of course one can only come to the material comparison of results, and think how a dry fly catch on a bright October day has shown up, or paled, beside that of another angler who has taken them down stream. I have had a blank on the Dove and Manifold in a heavy water, when others have taken perhaps two brace; but on the other hand have been fortunate in Dovedale in attracting a few specimen fish when the wet fly had only been swallowed by quarter pounders. In Hants I have never seen downstream fishing practised.

On a good day the dry fly method is valuable enough to take more grayling than any fair sized creel will hold.

It will sometimes enable you to drop a twenty ouncer into a tussock of grass or dock leaves every half hour, or quarter of a mile, during one's way up stream; to be picked up in the dusk on the way home, or even the next morning. An entry on the back of a last year's trout license gives Trafalgar Day, nine grayling: fifteen and a half pounds. That too had never counted a full dozen of small fish, either put back or given to similar sized urchins on the banks—whales to be placed head foremost into their pickle bottles, which they or their parents had for supper. Nor did it count two brace well over a pound each I can remember giving to four navvies on the railway bank, who were cooking something on the line at their midday meal.

That was a typical grayling day—almost too

good—when every condition was favourable; when knowledge of the water at that particular season aided one immensely, and when a series of lucky incidents was experienced from start to finish.

For actual fishing for grayling I will try and treat in the next chapter.

FLY FISHING FOR GRAYLING.

Chill October Days.

Since body of mine and rainy weather
Have lived on easy terms together.

COLERIDGE.

They have no song those sedges dry
  And still they sing.
It is within my breast they sing
  As I pass by.
Within my breast they touch a string,
  They raise a sigh,
'Tis but the sound of sedges dry,
  In me they sing.

MEREDITH.

RANKING well behind trout fishing as regards excitement and expense—just as the trout in all these particulars ranks behind the lordly salmon—yet angling for grayling in October and November, with the fly, can bring a pleasure to the man of moderate means who has a capacity for enjoying open air sport, which too many of us are apt to overlook.

With the end of September he as likely as not puts away his fly rod and sighs over the early autumn fire in the evening, regretting that shooting is beyond his means and attainment. Similarly, many who find a subscription to good trout water is annually growing more

expensive, quite disregard the fact that a rod on grayling water can be had for a third of the money and will afford them for two months or more a delightful pastime.

As I have already observed, the grayling is a maligned fish; as often as not judged from his appearance either in the early spring or a little later, when he succumbs to the mayfly, and to men too who would at once exclaim at the unfairness of estimating the behaviour of a trout when caught on a fly during, or just after, his spawning season. I can never forget my first experience in this way. A promising rise had attracted my attention, and a small red tag which fell above it was taken immediately, by a fish too which felt heavier than the half pound grayling which had been bobbing up at intervals and teasing my fly. He felt double the weight as he moved away, but there was no life, no rush; nothing but a sluggish wobbling under water occurred, and all the undervaluations of grayling fishing ran through my mind while reeling in something as lifeless as motionless as a played out bream. Netted and upset upon the grass it looked dark and slimy, and it was with almost dismay that I slowly recognised it was a trout. So uncanny was its appearance that even unhooking it was distasteful and when put back into the water it 'regained its freedom with a sigh.'

The fact is that trout are not so often seen out of season. Grayling are: and are freely taken more is the pity by anglers who ought

to know better. The tyro with his new outfit in mid May frequently finds the trout too much for him. All he can attract are out of season grayling. Well, the October grayling is vastly different; and when hooked in a Test or Itchen shallow on a drawn gut cast can show a prolonged fight equal to and sometimes better than a trout. That from the nature of the tackle he requires far nicer handling to avoid a parting in mid stream is undeniable, owing to the tenderness of his mouth in a great measure. Once let him set up a paddle wheel splashing in sight of the net and unless well hooked through the lip he will be free, perhaps floating away so exhausted by this last successful effort that it is even worth while trying to net him out a yard or so lower down.

In early October grayling may be found on the rise in suitable places almost the whole time, although on a cloudless day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. will probably account for the bulk of your catch. They do not feed as well in the dark as trout, but when they do not only are they heavy fish but are more decided about it than at other times. Anyone more desirous of taking home a full two pounder than of scoring in the matter of quantity, should make up his mind where to go from five to six o'clock. That is a time when larger fish will come close into the bank and take sedges or their imitation with confidence.

Treat them just as you would a September trout by making a careful stalk, expecting the

fish to take the first cast. If he does not then wait and try to learn his periodicity—that is to say do not throw just after he has risen, but just before he is due to rise again. He lies lower down in the water than a trout and consequently is less fitted for that double snap which a hungry trout will occasionally give.

It is best to make up one's mind to use nothing but a dry fly, a tapered cast with a 3 x drawn point, and a nought or two nought hook. It has been said that grayling are more tolerant of drag than trout. So they are—small or moderate sized grayling—but no, not the good ones. During the last seven seasons I have only twice had a grayling of over 1 lb. 7 oz. affix himself or herself to a dragging fly, and in each case it was to one which was racing across the stream in a semicircle.

That they do not stipulate for the same neatness or accuracy of casting is true enough. If feeding in a shallow however, a bungling cast or a sight of the angler will bring about the same furrowed rush into the open which we all know so well.

When in mid stream as they mostly are, and when rising in two or three feet of water, a grayling approached from below is very kind to the angler. She will sometimes allow him to float all the hundred best patterns over her head without taking the least alarm or offence. A well informed trout would not like this. He would move; and even then not keep his tongue quiet as he went. But grayling continue to

rise often at nothing visible to ordinary eyes, and are occasionally hooked foul in the back fin while doing so.

The only way with such fish is to persist; as well as keep on using smaller flies, until one gets down to the tiniest black spider on which I remember catching a fine grayling (2 lbs. 1 oz.) that had given me many walks back into the meadow to disentangle previous patterns. Two flies I have been especially lucky with are the orange-tag and the ruby-wickham: the one in deepish water and the other in shallows immediately above a run or stickle. The latter is so easily drowned owing to its tinsel sheath and its sparse dressing, that it needs to be well oiled, and kept for a very short time on the surface. Indeed half its efficacy appears to depend upon its impressionism.

Another hint I remember giving myself was 'dark flies in the morning, light flies in the afternoon.' But no one can be dogmatic who has fished for grayling long; and it may well be that some angler's diary contains the same formula with the two adjectives transposed. We are all inclined to form hasty rules from a particular run of luck at fishing as at whist.

A tiny red ant with semi invisible split wings —a Halford pattern fly bought at the Civil Service Stores—once effected a remarkable change upon a whole shallow full of medium sized grayling that I and a few others had thrown over until we were all tired. Sitting

on the hatch stile for a leisurely smoke after 2 o'clock one Sunday, I noticed a small pale red fly fluttering on the water, and although he had not been taken by anything, but disappeared under the fringe of floating weed which dammed itself against the hatchhole, I looked in my box to match it, and found the one described. The iron had a very distinct side bend, was desperately sharp, and in some way or other either the fly or the atmosphere resuscitated a feeling of confidence.

One specially dour fish, which had spurned everybody's Fancy and anybody's Glory, was still to be seen in a chalky opening between two long peninsulas of weed. I felt sure he would take it—and he did. The gut was finer than ever: the fly so small it seemed scarcely able to keep a secure hold. As he ran up I took the opportunity of crossing the stile and moving down to where the bank projected into a sort of cape, thus obtaining a straight course for him to come without troubling to call in at the dam of floating-weed. He was a long time on while the line was out to the taper at the reel end, but nervousness as to the gut and the small fly saved the situation. He was cajoled down with gentleness and persuasion and landed, a game and handsome fish of 1 lb. 9 oz.

I lost the next two, neither of them much over a pound, and then got one of a pound and a quarter before the fly snapped off. It was a pretty hour's sport because with the two

lost fish one could see them rise, turn, follow the fly and reject it time after time, always the moment it dragged. Yet they ended moth like in singeing their wings.

On wide and shallow stretches of grayling water where the fish can be seen rising at frequent intervals for hours at a time on a bright October or November day, one will usually find that this tempting prospect is tempered by a steady downstream wind. I said some time back that I had never seen grayling fished for downstream. This is a mistake, as in the very place described, I watched two rods one morning doing everything they could to circumvent these fish and all in vain. After they had gone I tried, with the same result, until I was sufficiently snubbed and was forced to retire to the hatch-stile and watch them through field glasses.

Seven or eight good fish could be located which at intervals of about half a minute came up in an easy manner, took a fly in a whisper, and then popped down again. One could see them lying above the grey bottom, evidently scanning the surface from its under side most carefully. From the hours—I might say weeks—spent upon that stile I became convinced that the sight of the angler is the sole reason for the grayling rejecting the artificial fly, and that, so long as their caution is not thus aroused, their mere sense of discrimination between the natural and imitation insect can be deceived. Since then I have always treated them as care-

fully as the shiest trout and have been amply rewarded.

On these days of a persistent downstream wind, when the fish appeared to feel themselves secure, the plan I found best was to approach the place from below upon a morning when no preliminary casting over them had taken place, and then make up one's mind either to counteract the wind and the drag of the long line, or else to leave them alone. With much high grass behind it is almost impossible; but in the place referred to the water meadows were smooth and close cropped.

It is important to vaseline the line well, not only the taper end but all the centre thick portion, as this enables it to fly through the rings easily.

Then uncoil a sufficient quantity to effect a cast of a full twenty yards—say the length of a cricket pitch. Indeed this is all I found I could manage without a hitch up in the grass behind. By coiling a portion of the line on the ground just at one's feet, and retaining another five or six loops in the left hand it is easy enough to begin making false casts upstream against a quiet wind, each time increasing the length of the line. By the time three quarters of the necessary line is in the air you are ready for the fish you have spotted.

Continue to throw so that the heavy portion of the line will fall upon the water upstream in a curve well above the fly; then, just while the line is travelling towards the desired place,

let go the loops from your left hand which will slip through the rings with quite a rush and effect exactly what you want, namely a curve with its convex presented to both wind and current. The wind has retarded your fly, which has pitched above the rising fish, while the loop of line has time, first to straighten, and then to curve downstream, before it begins to drag the fly. Draw in the line with your left hand in loops of a few feet while this is taking place.

During the process the grayling will rise, look at the fly, and take it.

Day after day in such places they will reward a successful cast when there is a soft down stream wind, and when they have not seen an angler.

The whole thing is a little trouble of course—flies snap off *et cet*—but I don't know anything that is not a trouble—that is if you look upon it as a trouble. Regarded as a sport requiring a favourable day, and then good planning and good casting, I have of late never found it to fail altogether, but have on several occasions hooked, lost, or landed two and even three brace within as many hours.

GRAYLING FISHING.

LATE OCTOBER—CLOUDLESS DAYS AND GOOD SPORT—THE FINEST GUT—AN UNCANNY CAPTURE.

> The heart is hard in nature and unfit
> For human fellowship . . .
> . . . that is not pleased
> With sight of animals enjoying life.
>
> COWPER.

> 'Twas in November when fine days are few
> And sober suns must set at five o'clock.
>
> BYRON.

IN trout fishing it is very commonly said that fish rise all along the river at about the same time, that is, if two men compare notes, they find that between nine and ten neither had risen a fish, and that during the next hour each had enjoyed good sport.

Now with grayling—in season—my experience has been quite the reverse. They will have their favourite times for surface feeding, but at no period of the day can the whole stretch of a four mile water be condemned, so long as the weather conditions are reasonably favourable. Barring storms and floods it is difficult to enjoy that absolute blank which trout will occasionally demand of us.

Sometimes, after wandering up or down half the water, one comes upon a turn or a pool in which a handsome couple are rising enchantingly. If you do not succeed in getting one with the first few casts, they may afford an hour's strenuous sport before they have finished with you. And what is more, if you are thoroughly beaten, there is the added dissatisfaction of knowing that a more suitable fly, or a better style of casting at the right moment, would have turned the tables.

Never leave a pool of rising grayling because you fancy that in some other part of the river there are better fish.

As likely as not you lose the bone for the shadow, and find that the coveted spot has been deserted. If it be November, take what the Gods send you and be thankful, for at any time of the day a nasty cold wind may spring up and handicap your chances badly. An excellent fly to put up thus late in the year is Bradshaw's Fancy; its straggly form seemingly corresponds to the shape of some rare insect whose figure has been disarranged by gusty weather. It is a fly which grayling are more likely to follow a foot or two downstream than any other I know.

Only this last season I had two fortunate week-ends late in October. Nearly everything in the way of tackle was new: a new reel—with no adjustable check: a new double-tapered line which had not lost its stiffness; and above all some new eighteen inch points of so-called 6 x

gut. I can answer for their length while as for their other quality they seemed finer than any I have ever used. I had left everything to be put together at the bank side, with the exception of damping the points.

After breakfast I started out under a misty but cloudless sky. The sun, which shone out early in the forenoon, lasted until two o'clock and even reappeared at teatime. I crossed the deep lock and passed up the private water, in which a man on the bank pointed out a jack of perhaps nine pounds lying in full view just below a weed bed. I asked about the wiring process, but he adroitly changed the subject owing to modesty in the matter of expert knowledge.

Above this is the island or peninsula opposite the lawn that fronts the large open pool. Two or more grayling were rising with that freedom which comes from the thought that they are out of casting distance from this side and are quite protected by overhanging garden bushes on the other. Then the river narrows and at our opening stile the opposite bank is reachable. While sitting a few yards back I saw two grayling in the faster water, each of them seemingly poised for a venture on the surface, so continued threading my line through the rod rings with one eye upon their movements.

My attention was soon distracted by the very prettiest weasel which slipped out of a large thorn bush and peered round the neighbourhood. It stood up, lengthened its body out almost like

a cobra and then dropped down again to move forward. As it left a good distance between itself and the bush I thought I could manage something with the landing net by cutting off its retreat, but although it was quite twenty yards beyond the bush on the other side, and I was barely ten on this, he made a dart back like a trout and gained his undergrowth before I had moved a few paces.

Well, the grayling: they continued in view all the time I finished tackling up, never actually coming to the surface although it was easy to see what they were thinking of. The lower one looked up, rather than rose, at a Bradshaw's Fancy which floated down over her. You could see she was sorry to have missed it. The second time too, she made a movement of attraction. The next cast she took it lightly in her lips and turned down. I had to play the fish, or perhaps allow her to play me, right through another man's water; but fortunately met him in the process and explained the position. I felt glad that he accepted the fish (1 lb. 12 oz.) after netting it for me in the still pool above the lock.

Above this is the bend opposite the boat-house, well reputed for its large bath-like pools where a few good grayling are always rising at intervals, but which are so constantly cast over by anglers who put up their rods at the stile that they are almost dry-fly-proof.

At the time of my visit the river had enjoyed a considerable period of rest; indeed, so far as

I could gather from the keeper, no rod but mine had been out for a fortnight. In spite of it being a public footpath I thought it worth while to sit down on the bank if necessary for half an hour and think what could be done. I made a resolve to cast very seldom and then only for fish which had already risen several times. The Bradshaw not proving a grayling fancy I watched for the fly on the water and dipped a sample out. It was a small grey midge not unlike a sparsely dressed blue upright.

By standing in a foot of chalky mud I at last got a comfortable seat on a tussock of rushes and waited. Every now and then a passer by would come, usually downstream, would look at the water, stand and watch a few rises, and then intimate the fact to me by pointing at the grayling with his stick. It was only polite to thank each one in the same vacant manner while continuing to smoke as abstractedly as though I had managed to get out without my keeper. After a time they felt nervous and moved on.

What a feeling of relief it is when this happens, and how short the interval seems between their attentions. Fortunately it is sometimes a female who merely praises one's virtue of patience to her companion in a faint hearted manner as they pass out of earshot.

Towards twelve o'clock there is an hour or more of perfect quiet: the fish are still on the feed and pop up more confidently. The little grey fly is impatient for action, drops on the

pool, thanks to the fine points, as softly as thistle down and is so delicately taken that it must be by something very small. But the strike alters all this. A fine run right up the inlet at the head of the pool carries plenty of line with it, as well as the conviction that the grayling which is 'on'—for the time being—may be heavier than he seems.

Being a case for gentle treatment I sat down where I was and held up quietly to give him ample time for tiring himself out. Away he went right over to the deeper far side: then ran rapidly down stream, obliging me to get up and follow as the line was got in. In every pool he would stop, turn, and bore down to the bottom. After fully five minutes of this treatment I got the net under him and dipped him out, a game fish of exactly two pounds.

At no time in his life does a large grayling show to better advantage than when he smells the net. Although pretty well worn down, he does not give in just at the last, as a trout will often do, but sets up his great cinereous back fin and always keeps it at right angles to the pressure on his mouth. It therefore becomes the greatest folly for the angler to attempt to pull the fish over the rim of the net; as he does with careless confidence when mayfly fishing for trout. More fine grayling have been lost in that critical position than at any other period of the playing process.

From the same pool I got three others without moving more than a yard or so up the bank.

The still air, the stiff line, and the new fine points favoured long casts, while the small fly was certainly to their liking. None of the three were equal to the first, but all were over a pound and a half, and all behaved most sportingly. Neither the fly nor the point failed during some two hours of casting. Only one fish got off, from not being struck quickly enough; and he was perhaps the smallest of the lot.

Had I roamed up the meadows in the forenoon I doubt whether I should have obtained anything as good as the two brace which lay on the grass alongside me—for they were much too pretty to squash into the canvas bag—caught upon the opening sixty yards of water. The sun was hot on my back, the air as still as in a room, and the smoke from a cigar which I found in my pocket had scarcely the energy to move away. I arranged those grayling, and rearranged them, head and tail, opening out their dorsal fins and sprinkling them with water, until they shone mauve and golden in the sunlight. All jealousy of passers-by disappeared: indeed the sight of the fish and the flattering comments as to their size became quite pleasant. 'Did you ketch those out of the river mister?' asked one lanky youth. 'No, Juggins 'e bought them at the fish shop' answered his friend, who had a fine taste in sarcasm.

Where does the name *thymallus* come from? I remember on that occasion trying my best to extract any sniff of thyme from these freshly

caught grayling, but with no vestige of conviction. So often does one provoke the odour of thyme by treading on it in the rushes, that the very smell of mint sauce with cold lamb always brings a flash of some grayling day across the cinematograph of memory.

I never mind missing luncheon when out fishing: but to miss tea is quite another matter, so at three o'clock I returned to the inn parlour and ordered the usual tray of good things, which always makes one start out again with hope and confidence. At four o'clock the broad open pool above the hatch stile spread out invitingly, though not a movement broke its surface. The water was so clear that in several openings among the weeds, which were hardly within casting distance, I could see grayling swaying as it seemed from side to side.

The reason always given me for grayling preferring the shallow water in mid stream is that they are well away from jack. Certainly the ones in the position I mention are there from year to year, in all seasons; and what is more, they are usually quite disposed to rise for many hours at a time, sometimes in the morning, sometimes only during midday, and sometimes just at about sunset. They are the most knowing, perverse, and attractive *coterie* of grayling I have ever met, unless it be a small group near the tea house in Dovedale. Report says there is a syndicate at Hungerford of two pounders who have also passed a resolution barring artificial fly from their *menu*.

After waiting for half an hour I decided to move on to a nice glide under the left bank, where large fish are often taken at this time of the evening. Almost before I reached the place I saw a rise—so close to me that I had to stoop and back into the rushes. The very moment the fly touched the water it was taken. The strike suggested that it was a heavy fish but a sluggish one. Had not the river been very free from weeds just here the gut could not have held, for after a desperate splashing on the surface, I netted out a large trout of perhaps two pounds and a quarter, seemingly in good yellow condition, very fat and I suppose full of spawn.

I am ashamed to say I do not know the one sex from the other. Anyhow I did not detain him, or her, for long. The hook had caused no pain or inconvenience; and he sailed back into mid stream as though none the worse for the adventure. A poor grayling caught out of season often receives different treatment.

After wandering higher up to a turn in the river which we called 'duffer's corner' and only catching one insignificant fish, I came slowly back to the hatch stile, wondering all the way down what sort of luck a man would have who was allowed to 'swim the worm' or the maggot, as he walked down stream. Not that I had the slightest desire to do so; for, apart from never being able to put a worm on to a hook, I should not fancy handling or eating the fish that came to so distasteful a bait. It is merely a case of

what the eye does not see. Grayling may dote on gentles of course, as a nice looking girl may on stout or onions, but there are times when it is not pleasant to think of. During the next three days I had very similar sport, including one grayling which I shall always remember with apprehension. It was at the extreme upper boundary of our water, where a small ditch and post marks the line across which we must not step. Needless to say, I ended by leaning against the post and gazing upstream, like the donkey in Bewick's woodcut who thinks the grass on the other side of the hurdles is better than his own field. Close under the steep bank there was a rise. A bubble floating down suggested a feeding fish.

However, one or two rising below me looked equally attractive; so I dropped back and cast for them, getting two or three but none of any size. For a long time I tried to break myself of the idea of casting into water above our boundary, arguing jesuitically that so long as my feet were not trespassing there was nothing illegal in it. Strictly speaking (I murmured) the law does not allow a man, who owns one bank, to throw for fish beyond the middle of the stream; yet everybody makes a speciality of the opposite bank whenever and wherever he fishes.

Once again I was up with my hip against the post; and again a large dark fin broke the surface—but so high up that it seemed quite out of casting distance. That of course decided it. Vanity and the devil conquered. If the fly

could not reach the rise there was no harm in throwing just for practice; as wild horses would not have dragged me to put a footprint on the other side of the dividing ditch.

Gradually the line was got out; loop after loop added yards to the false casts without any suspicion of a hitch up behind. There were still two loops of heavy line in my left hand as I made the throw, and never did they slip through the rings more glibly, or shoot out in a more perfect manner. The fly pitched a full foot above the last rise—and, to my terror, it was taken.

As I struck, the grayling jumped clear out of the water—higher and more vigorously than ever one did before or has done since—made a swift semicircle across to the opposite side, far away under the rushes of the broad pool, and then went down stream. As I stood and wound up the coils of slack line, I honestly prayed that he was not on. But he was. Hurrying round the bend, I got him on a very short line and began to walk down the bank, feeling so guilty that I longed each moment for a parting to be naturally brought about, yet all the time treating him so judiciously that it did not occur. Into every deep pool and current he dived and wriggled: then lost ground, swam down stream, and turned again to worry.

By this time I had come over four hundred yards, and worse than all, had passed another angler who was walking up. Twice I tried to net the fish, knowing full well he was not ready

for it. The bank was high, the current deep and strong, so I still walked on. Had he been fairly taken I should have got him; but I still had the discomforting feeling about his ownership. Making a last dip at him with the net, the rim touched the cast—and he was off. Never was there such a sense of relief in the atmosphere; although never has a grayling made anything resembling the prolonged fight that he did. Here was a fish of perhaps two pounds and a quarter, free after a run of over six hundred yards from where he was hooked.

Whenever I think back on it, I inwardly thank goodness that he escaped, for I dare not have returned him to the water after landing him; as the other angler would have guessed my guilty conscience at putting back such a plucky prize caught fairly on a fly on the first of November. Nothing has made me a firmer believer in the wiles of the wicked one than this bad quarter of an hour's sport. Even the vain curiosity of wanting to measure the length of the cast could never tempt me to make the necessary number of paces into the meadow above that ditch. I prefer to regard it as an infernal record.

The final wind up after the last day of a grayling season is somewhat sad to a man who has no chance of shooting. Rapidly shortening days, the curtailment of outdoor exercise, and the inevitable four months of winter, make one look forward to the coming spring and its early

trout fishing prospects with something like apprehension, lest anything should occur to render this day the last of rubber boots and flooded meadows. Yet this is an ungrateful feeling to harbour, seeing that one has all the pleasant memories of a good season to dwell upon, while less lucky men have put away their rod and reel some two months previously, without ever experiencing the aftermath of autumn enjoyment that the grayling season affords to those who can take advantage of it.

THE CURVED MEADOW.

PARTING REMINISCENCES—A CONFIDENCE—
THE HABITAT OF POUNDERS.
THE TRUE EVENING RISE—PLEASURES OF LIFE—
CONTRABAND THOUGHTS.

.....non sine montium
Clamore vicinæque silvæ
Cum fera diluvies quietos
Inritat amnes.

HORACE.

Where the huge Pine and Poplar silver lined
With branches interlaced have made
A hospital shade,
And where by curving bank and hollow bay
The tremulous waters work their silent way.

Translation of HORACE.

THE price of the identity of the curved meadow is, in my valuation, above rubies; and I must trust to any one of the few chance readers of these lines who knows, or who guesses the secret, not to disclose it.

Let him and I, or even at the very worst them and I, keep this knowledge between us, and hold it inviolate; not even mentioning it in our wills, lest when we arise with rod and creel in the happy hunting ground state, we should find its marge and rushes trodden over and

defaced by the iron heels of the *profanum vulgus*.

It lies surrounded by copse—or by hangers, as dear old Gilbert would have termed it, had it existed near Selborne—which as we know, you and I, that it does not. It is approachable by one path only; up, up through the bracken and brambles, the wild roses and the foxgloves, a steep and slippery footway even in day-light, whose ascent must be unhurried if one's rod is set up, where the top joint has to be poked and guided under the broad beech boughs; until, hot and breathless, we reach the rough fence leading into the steep meadow overlooking the river.

The time is nearing eight o'clock in June. The shadows of the larches have lengthened until they cross the grass like trenches, and are merged into the brushwood at the lower end. Below on the right is the hanging wood, where huge beeches, some of whose tops one can look over, hold on to the steep red cliff and preserve it, and the river below, from unsightly landslides season after season. Through the branches one can see the full glow of the sunlight on the opposite valley, its well defined purple shadow creeping up the hillside minute by minute.

A hundred yards further on there is the only gap. Our meadow dips down, and the curved meadow below rises on tiptoe to meet it, under an old hawthorn tree to which the fence is nailed. For seven years those same nails have

held good and borne the weight of the fortunate angler, while plucking at his garment, who expects a crash and a tumble each time he has laboriously climbed over; until in his mind the fence has seemed to grow more secure each succeeding summer.

And now, fifty feet below, the vista of the curved meadow brings back the same feelings of absolute enjoyment,—of journeys ending in lovers meeting—that it did on the first evening you discovered it. Looking across the river you may see a fisherman pass by, like the Levite, on the other side; and you shrink under the sheltering nut bushes, with the rabbits you have disturbed, until he is out of sight and hearing. Not that he could actively or passively interfere at that time of the evening, but lest he might discover the narrow path and occupy your sacred ground on some other occasion.

Well, he has gone, so you are free to make your way to the lower end, where the deep water comes down towards you under the beech roots; and the trout, who never intend to be caught by anything but a dap, are already busy sucking down flies with a sense of security not only fancied but actual. How it would surprise one of these specimen fish to find itself hooked were such a scheme possible; but, with the network overhead of protective roots and branches, they will remain to excite envy and admiration for many years to come.

From this point to the half mile higher up stream, where the river escapes from the large

pool and leaves the wooded cliff, the curved meadow extends; its lower hundred yards fringed with rank rushes on this side, growing on a black bed of squelchy mud, against whose clinging affection even knee-high rubber boots are hardly proof, if one is trying to land a fish struggling frantically among the rushes.

Over the meadow, at intervals, are clumps of yellow iris, their glory now for the most part faded and fallen, like that of the pink chestnuts.

The opposite bank is edged with thorny bushes like dwarf sloes, and the water under them is deep and smooth, with oily eddies wherever the small openings occur, the holt of cautious pounders who rise only once or twice in the evening, and then usually at real flies which flutter as they glide.

Then the river—walking up—becomes open, a gravelly run of broken water, not very deep, with trailing weed of brilliant green, hiding free rising trout of more moderate dimensions—eight, nine, and ten ouncers; less shy as to showing themselves, yet withal desperately sharp sighted in matters of knowing a hawk from a hern saw.

Above this, is a long glide very open and shallow with a narrow but deep channel close under the elders of the opposite bank, all of which is well nigh unfishable from that side. That is why the Levite passed along, you understand, on his way up to the big pool; because he could not throw under the overhanging bushes.

This continues for the rest of the way, terminating in fifty yards of the most perfect deep run, just below the gravelly and stony stickle leading from the dam pool under the jackdaw rock. For a final half hour of downstream fishing at dusk, with a sedge or palmer, this run and shallow offer a generous solatium on days when no dry fly has charmed ever so fruitlessly during the preceding hour, and when disappointment and vexation have done their worst.

Thus the features and figure of the curved meadow offer every variation of beauty; and hardly a summer passes that it does not give the angler at least two hours of memory which he will store to the westering of his days.

It is not always that a short beat offers such diversity of angling: each furlong, as it were, asking for its particular change of fly and for its special tactics. In early spring, for downstream success, the upper portion is unrivalled; in April and May the middle stretch affords ideal water for quick up-and-across casting; and in summer, the lower end harbours just those experienced trout whose wits are best circumvented by the small dry midge after sundown.

Having dealt at some length on the theory and practice of blank days, as enjoyed by myself and hundreds of others; I would like to tell you, if I may, of my first successful evening spent upon this enchanted ground.

I had reached the river, where the wire bridge

crosses to the farm, at seven o'clock, and had done all I could in the way of careful fishing from there to the open dam, above which the copse commences. Two fair sized trout had taken a detached olive, and were brought to bay and to bank; while a third—needless to say a better one—hooked in a glassy shallow, had got off by jumping among the stones, so that I had the first brace well before that twilight of the Gods—the true evening rise, which I always agreed to be content with.

It was ten minutes to eight, and to lose no chance whatever, it seemed best to sit down at the foot of the copse path, and eat the supper I had brought with me, a leg of cold fowl in a paper bag full of mustard and cress. By thus securing, or rather booking, the entrance to the meadow I should make sure of it, in case another angler appeared on the scene.

But no one came; a fact for which I felt selfishly grateful. To have to explain to a friend that you do not mind where you go, after you have made certain elaborate plans and day dreams of their result, is both inconvenient and untruthful; and one can luxuriate in solitude with the thought that he is doing better elsewhere, and that you and he can enjoy talking about it at another time and place. The animal instinct of possession asserts its most pleasurable force under such conditions.

From the way the path was overgrown, it was clear that no one had been up to it for at least a fortnight, and to make the descent two

hours later in the dark a little less risky, I bent back several nut branches so that the underside of the leaves showed up whiter, as well as hitching two pieces of paper upon them, to give a clue out of the labyrinth.

My first two visits had been very unfortunate; but then I had, as advised, fished the water 'down' on each occasion, and had also lost four good fish in succession, by the stupidity of continuing to cast with a barbless fly. This evening however, while climbing the hawthorn fence, the plan of campaign was different, and more deviceful. I had at least learned not to hurry; so sat down and contemplated the water until the shadow on the hill opposite crept right up the stems of the larch trees on the eastern sky line.

In the opening glide below the rushes two fish rose in a tempting manner, and the detached olive seemed as good as anything that could be offered to them. To get below them was practically impossible, as the overhanging branches threatened to catch the fly at every attempt to get out more line. To throw a foot or so below them was easy, but the very first try to put it above their noses fastened the fly round a beech leaf, and obliged me to stand up and unhitch it. The gut was weakened so was changed for a new point and fly.

I determined to leave this couple alone, thankful that they continued to rise, instead of running up and spreading the alarm. They knew all about the casting distance from below,

and were far too wide awake to accept any downstream cast at this time of day. Crawling to the lower end of the rushes, I thought for some time I would avoid treading in the mud; as, having on ordinary nailed boots, I shirked the ordeal of wet feet. That bogey however soon disappeared, and the cool trickle inside first one boot and then the other, followed by a warm glow as the water changed to tepid round thick lambswool socks, made me independent of soft places for the rest of the evening.

The first pronounced rise of a feeding trout in such an ambuscade is very exciting. I could more hear than see it clearly, as the rushes were high, and I did not want to give anything away. It came again, and a third time, before the olive was placed somewhere near it. Nothing happened for a few casts, beyond that the fish was put down. For a long five minutes not a ring occurred, excepting from my two friends far below me, at which I felt tempted to make a long downstream sweep.

I moved very slowly a shade higher up, where I heard another promising ploop in mid stream. He rose again. I could see him take a fly: and the next moment he took mine. After a disturbing spring and splash he made for the opposite side, just where peace and quietness ought to reign; so he was given a tight line, pulled into the current, until he ran close in to the rushes, got the cast round one, and kicked and splashed on the surface. I managed to slide him over the rim of the net, but had

great difficulty in freeing the gut without fraying it badly. Gradually it cut the rush up its entire length, enabling me to reel in and lift out my capture. He was a golden beauty, full of life and vigour; not three quarters but near it, a fish to raise the average of a catch and not lower it—that is always a satisfaction.

The gut was smooth and round. A touch of the oil brush quite restored the disarranged coiffure of the fly, and made her as attractive as ever. There were two other midstreamers rising, but they sounded too noisy to be of any size, so I kept my eye on the deeper water under the sloe bushes.

In one little embayment there was a tiny ring, the suck down of a larger fish probably, and after a false cast or two the olive came slowly over the place. He would not have it, nor again,—nor again. I felt that the second and third casts were a mistake; for though I waited, and watched, like a toper at an inn door, that trout never showed his nose above the surface. The same thing happened in the next opening: this time two flies were taken, and mine offered him a third, but he too treasured some experience of bygone days, and retired a cheerful but wiser fish.

The time was getting on; I looked at my watch with apprehension, a quarter to nine, and only one as yet. The next promising rise occurred so close under an overhanging prickly branch, that I had to move up opposite to it before a cast was possible. The fly drifted

over the spot: then a foot lower down was taken well, whether by my riser or another below, I cannot say. Not a sign was made and I could not remember whether I had struck him at all.

Something was 'on,' and that something heavy, quiet, and uneasy. Getting the line in, I moved quickly downstream before attempting to feel the fish's pulse. He had not weeded me, and the vibration of the line showed that it was round no obstruction. For perhaps a minute nothing happened. Then, up he came, showed himself to be a real pounder, and began a series of desperate tugs that looked as though he had seen a friendly root to make for. Both hook and gut held: he was in midstream, losing ground at each struggle. Not until he had been worked into the shallow water below the rushes could he be netted; a solid lumper, one pound one ounce, with the fly scarcely barb deep in the horny roof of his mouth.

Here was a prize that made me thirst for more; but I wonder whether other anglers suffer from the same disturbing want of resolution. Much as I wanted to move up, I had to linger and see whether there was a dimple to be imagined under the sloes.

Where the water became shallower the evening rise was in full play; so pushing up to the end of the rushes I took stand under the high bank. It had then always been given me as an axiom, that when trout are rising in the stickles they mean taking; so acting on this, presumptuously, I began throwing for fish after fish, and found

that there are several exceptions to the rule; for, after being touched by some of no size, I only hooked and landed two, both of which were more found drowned, as a coroner would say, than wounded by malice prepense. I grudged every second that went by, even the time occupied in taking them off the hook.

It was now less necessary to take cover, and as the larger fish seemed well above me in the smoother water, I cut off the fly, and tied on a fair sized hare's ear with gold ribbing, mounted on rather stronger gut which if it survived could be used at first dry and ultimately wet. Right over on the far side a trout rose repeatedly, almost savagely, and yet would not see it. The shadow of a large elder bush made it difficult to judge the exact distance, though from the desperate gulps he was giving every half minute, it was certain he could not resist.

I got right opposite at last, threw across, a yard above him, and simply knew he would come. A snap, a strike, three 'rugs' and he was on, bolting down stream as though he were on fire. A vision of the catch of the season, a two pounder, added excitement to the noise of a stridulous reel. Then I thought he was foul hooked in the tail. Anyhow, his attachment was secure, and after taking me back to the rushes again, he was collared, an ugly black headed chap of fourteen ounces with the expression of a bull dog.

Moving up again to the smooth water the fishing was perfect. An unruffled expanse of

yellow surface, hardly a foot deep, with the best of the waning light showing up every rise, most of which required an uncommonly long cast. After several refusals, I fortunately decided that the hare's ear was too large and sodden to float well, so cut it off and tied on a small blue quill gnat, which was already attached to a fine point. As with grayling-fishing on drawn gut, this makes one far more careful both in throwing and striking.

Straight above me, near my own bank, a good trout was rising at intervals: the only drawback being an intervening tussock of grass and weed on which the line would have to rest. Behind, all was clear; so that, provided the fly pitched right the first time, he ought to take it. I edged as near as I could, but being almost in the water was fearfully anxious not to send up a warning ripple, and then threw well above him. He waited for it to come down, and so did I. He took it with unconcern, making a diagonal furrow right across the shallow towards the opposite bank, and was more than surprised at receiving any check whatever. As there were no stakes or holes I deemed best not to be too rough, so kept a very gentle pressure and gradually got him on a manageable length of line; but found I had overdone matters by winding in the knot of the cast. However, he never jumped from first to last, and was gradually tired down, though I had to wade out to net him—over fourteen ounces and well shaped at that. In the same water I lost

another by striking too soon, and caught two more of nine, and ten ounces, after a great deal of cautious stalking.

And then at half past nine the rise suddenly stopped. As the light was failing, and the trout had been laid on the grass in different places, I thought I would collect them before having a final try downstream during the later rise, which usually occurs from 9.45 to ten o'clock. I found all but one, which a rat or a heron must have made off with. A slight white mist crawled over the upper part of the meadow, making it look like the edge of things, and brought with it a sense of nervousness, so that I did not go up across the grass but came back to the rushes and made casts over them at hazard.

As I knew I must put down the rod, before leaving and going through the copse, I voted just another dozen casts, and after making a few of them found my fly in something heavy. Getting a short line and feeling it boring slowly down stream, I followed quietly until there seemed the risk of the fish getting under the beech roots. Putting on a strain it came slowly up, then gave a dull pull, and again made for the bottom. The water was specially dark and deep. Nothing I could manage effected any good. How the gut held, and why the fish did not kick, was so strange that I peered close to the water, and at last made out the fly tight into a long floating branch or bramble, which had a way of turning over in

the current. It was rather an ignominious ending to so good an evening's sport, but it made me reel up quickly and start away to the fence and upper field.

It was dark and eerie under the trees, and half way along something rushed out of the fern close under my feet. What it was I do not know, but it sounded the size of a fox.

Down the steep path at last, probing into ferny vacancy at each step with the landing net handle—even gratefully clutching brambles; thankful for nailed boots, and for not sliding through the brushwood into the river below; thankful for the guiding bits of paper which showed up nobly, I reached the bottom in a sitting position, with a sense of prickly relief, and hurried on the last half mile towards the ladder stile where the narrow cart road terminates.

The moon was getting up, and the white cob walls of the few thatched cottages stood out coldly in its half light, while the cypresses round the church were correspondingly black in the shadow.

From that point I had, on two previous occasions, walked the five or more miles home, a rather severe tramp after an unsuccessful day; but this time a trap had been ordered at the church for a quarter past ten. It was now past that; the road was painfully silent, and the prospect of the walk not alluring. A sound of hoofs in the far distance: later on, a glimpse of two friendly lights soon dispelled all mis-

givings on that score. This time it was congratulation,—too often it had been sympathy—that followed the question of 'Have you had any luck?'

The drive back that evening was made under the pleasantest circumstances one could desire. The cool night air after the warm day, the heavy rug round wet feet, and a long deferred smoke and talk about the evening's adventures, the smell of the hay in the meadows and presently the sight and smell of the moonlit sea, with the muffled roll of the heavy shingle on the beach, all helped to canonise the meadow and the date.

Many other successful evenings have been spent there—with the hope of others to come—but this one, so far, still stands out as perhaps the kindliest of all.

For seven consecutive seasons the trout on this half mile of water have maintained their exact stations, showing most clearly that their notions of etiquette as to feeding places are conservative. Not only does one get to know the positions selected by the best fish, but even the places in which they will almost always refuse, or accept, a well pitched fly.

Another experience too is interesting, which is that these good evenings have not been and cannot be attributed to some special pattern of fly, but embrace fully half a dozen; so that it is impossible to name any particular favourite to conjure with. On the last visit of all the

fly put up was a ginger quill, dressed so sparsely that the hook appeared in attractive nudity; odourless paraffin taking the place, upon its rounded form, of the gauze-like raiment which encases the cool arms of a summer syren.

At other times a black gnat, in the garb of a crépe-clad widowy girl, has brought its followers quite as freely: while a floating Wickham, with its gilded corsage; a sober olive, with its artistic green drapery; or a pale watery dun, have added fish after fish to the bank behind the rushes. *Nimium ne crede colori,* is here as good a motto as any.

On disappointing evenings you may change from fly to fly, and effect nothing. Fish are there, and are rising, but they are not in the mood for eating hooks; and no dressing or ribbing is able to provide the sauce or to change their sullen demeanour.

* * * * * * * * *

I have always promised myself—and never kept the promise—to try dapping under the beech roots. There is an ideal seat, backed by the red cliff, and carpeted with harts' tongues, exactly over the deep water, where two and sometimes three special young bloods take every fly that passes—even those you catch and throw down to them.

To attempt anything on an ordinary cast, attached to a rod top, must be useless. A dive of a few feet would wind the gut round a net work of roots and effect a break in record time.

Some day—perhaps one Sunday evening—I mean to attach a foot of strong catapult elastic to a walking stick, fasten four feet of gut to it, with a winged olive at the point, and then just see whether it floats.

Imagination paints these fish as ones which have been severely pricked in seasons gone by, which have given up the open water and taken refuge with Tityrus. Not only are they confirmed surface feeders, but they continue at it the greater part of the day. It sounds desperately unsporting not to leave them in their hermitage; and yet—I suppose I must do so.

Perhaps a solemn vow to restore the possible victim to his asylum, would meet the case. If they had just some sense of shyness, one would not mind so much; but they rise inordinately, while staring you in the face, and gulp like gourmands who adjust a dinner napkin under their triple chins before wallowing in turtle soup. And, all this time, their fellows are taking chances in the open water, braving a casualty list during the long evenings of each summer campaign, with the risk of having their weights and fighting qualities mentioned in the leaves of an angling despatch. It does not seem fair.

* * * * * * * * *

Do you ever find you are apt to put certain places as it were upon pedestals, just as one puts certain friends? There are times when one calls up the small panorama of a favourite

scene of river bend, and slowly paints in every detail with all the accuracy of a softly toned picture, just as one recalls a familiar face or an evening's conversation upon topics never likely to be referred to again excepting in the company of that particular person.

You did not know, at the time, how they would be treasured, or what an effect they had exercised upon retina or memory. You long to be in certain places in certain moods; just as you long to talk to a special friend, and would gladly travel two hundred miles to enjoy a few hours exactly as you have planned in your daydreams.

Why is it too that although perhaps you have always fished fairly—possibly from never having had the temptation of departing therefrom placed before you in practical form—the account of a contraband experience, graphically and amusingly recounted by a companion, always sounds so fascinating? There must be some analogy between fly fishing and intrigue. The stealing down through the leafy copse, the lonely meadow, the hour after sunset, the dewy grass, the churr of the fern owl, the excitement of anticipation, the disappointment of success, the haunting memory of failure.

* * * * * * * * *

Well, it is time to reel up and say goodbye. You and I have never met—probably never shall—but I sincerely wish you all the moderate good luck, and immoderate pleasure, that I am

enjoying. If we still retain enthusiasm, I trust that you, and I, may both have another twenty years of such enjoyment.

Let us grow young early if we would keep young long.

And, if we cannot have quite that same eyesight and activity, we can retain the old keenness unabated; with nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to renounce, nothing to regret. If any untoward accident should take away fly fishing from us, we can only bow in resignation to the epitaph on Hasdrubal

.....occidit, occidit
spes omnis et fortuna nostri.....

— FINIS. —

POSTSCRIPT.

The pleasure of receiving letters whose contents have no odour of money about them, and which often come from anglers at home or abroad is one that all of us appreciate. I am fortunate enough to belong to a small mutual coterie who write periodically to each other about our riverside doings or failures; and should be only too willing to hear from new correspondents—especially such as are beginning to take up fly fishing, either at the age of twenty or forty—if they think I am able to be of assistance to them. The glamour round my own angling apprenticeship has never been dissipated. Days, when the total bag was a lost half-pounder, are still delightful to remember; and to hear about from one who sincerely enjoys all the surroundings of the stream and who realises he has much to learn.

R. H.

April, 1912.

Comerade I will give you my hand,
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law,
Will you give me yourself?
Will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

WALT. WHITMAN.

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